Internationalization: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?

BY CHARLOTTE WEST

NAFSA

Association of International Educators

ABOUT NAFSA

NAFSA: Association of International Educators is a member organization promoting international education and providing professional development opportunities to the field. Hundreds of NAFSA members volunteer to serve the Association and thousands advocate for international education. NAFSA serves international educators and their institutions and organizations by establishing principles of good practice, providing training and professional development opportunities, providing networking opportunities, and advocating for international education.

For more information about NAFSA, visit www.nafsa.org.

Edited by Elaina Loveland, NAFSA

Cover designed by Cheryl D. Collins, NAFSA (Shutterstock)

NAFSA

Association of
International Educators

Internationalization: Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?

BY CHARLOTTE WEST

Internationalization has matured to a point where international education leaders need to take stock of where they have been and make sure they are on the right path forward, says Jane Knight, a researcher and adjunct professor at University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Comprehensive internationalization both at home and through mobility-based programs has created several unintended consequences—including increased competition at the expense of collaboration—that need to be carefully examined. While there is no single organizational model to best foster these difficult conversations, successful leaders will embed internationalization within the core mission of an institution by creating a shared and compelling rationale for it, anchoring it within policies and processes and answering the key question of "What core education purpose is being served by these initiatives?" Another essential characteristic of successful internationalization—and the ability to critically self-reflect on institutional priorities—is the presence of structures that garner faculty support.

New Developments and Unintended Consequences of Internationalization

At the Symposium on Leadership at the NAFSA: Association of International Educators 2011 Annual Conference in May, Knight laid out a series of tough questions that international educators need to ask and answer. She argues that internationalization—both in terms of meaning and content—has changed significantly over the last 30 years and it's time for leaders to take a step back and assess the current state of international education. Recent developments and initiatives include the growing numbers participants in academic mobility schemes, increased emphasis on developing global competencies, a rise in the numbers of joint and double degree programs, and the creation of regional education hubs, education cities, and gateways.

"As internationalization adapts to meet new challenges, it is important to examine the key concepts that inform and shape the internationalization process and sometimes result in unexpected developments and unanticipated results," she says.

The meaning of the term "internationalization" itself has had its own history. The word first began to be used commonly in the field of international education in the 1980s. Because "internationalization" needs to be generic enough to apply to many different countries, cultures and education systems, Knight argues that the term sometimes means different things to different people, especially when competing with a myriad of other descriptors such as "cross-border," "transnational," "borderless," "international," "global" and "multicultural" modes of education. While the term internationalization is widely used nowadays, these other terms are sometimes used as well.

She proposes a value-neutral definition of "internationalization": "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education." She further emphasizes it is important to ensure a definition does not specify the rationales, benefits, outcomes, actors, activities, and stakeholders of internationalization, as they vary enormously across nations and institutions. "What is critical is that the international dimension relates to all aspects of education and the role that it plays in society," Knight adds.

An example of how an individual institution has defined "global studies" is Whitman College's Global Studies Initiative (GSI), funded by a $350,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, provost and dean of the faculty, says they have very consciously developed a particular organizational model and approach to internationalization. "We have expressly rejected the idea of organizing this initiative in the form of a new department, a new major program, or a center expressly dedicated to global studies. Instead, our aim is to infuse global perspectives into the entire curriculum so as to ensure that an education in these perspectives is a vital part of the education of all of our students, no matter what major they may choose," he explains.

In addition, "global studies" is not associated with any specific academic discipline but has rather been constructed as a cross-disciplinary endeavor. Nor does "global studies" equal "international studies," especially

2011 NAFSA Symposium on Leadership

Just as the annual NAFSA conference gathers a broad spectrum of international education professionals working with everything from international student enrollment to outbound study abroad, the NAFSA Symposium on Leadership brought together top-level administrators and senior leaders from different institution types together to discuss the future of internationalization and how to develop the appropriate structures to support it.

Sponsored by the NAFSA International Education Leadership Knowledge Community, the symposium, held on Tuesday, May 31, 2011, looked at the structures to best organize and manage comprehensive internationalization. After a brief introduction by moderators Britta Baron, vice provost and associate vice president (international) at University of Alberta, and Jeffrey Riedinger, dean of international studies and programs at Michigan State University, the University of Toronto's Jane Knight discussed the unintended consequences of internationalization. Her presentation was followed up by a discussion of successful organizational leadership by Matthew Hartley, associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and expert in academic governance. After a group discussion on the changing institutional landscape of internationalization, the symposium concluded with a panel of leaders from several types of institutions: Carl Amrhein, provost and vice president at University of Alberta; Timothy Kaufman-Osborn, provost and dean of the faculty at Whitman College; David Potter, former president of North Georgia College and State University; and Kathy Kinloch, president of Vancouver Community College. This article is based on the highlights of this event.

in the sense of "foreign affairs." "Our aim is to ensure that students come to appreciate how their lives, no matter how fully lived in the local, are in fact already and deeply implicated in global webs of connection," Kaufman-Osborn says.

While such a global perspective may be the ultimate goal of institutions, Knight says the international education field has reached maturity and is currently experiencing a bit of a backlash. For example, the International Association of Universities' 2009 Survey on Internationalization reports that senior leaders at higher education institutions ranked "focus on internationalization at expense of other priorities" as fifth in importance in terms of risks facing internationalization. "This is sign that while internationalization is important it may begin to lose some of its priority at the institutional level especially as internationalization becomes more closely linked with commercialization, commodification, competition, and branding," Knight says. Other risks associated with internationalization included faculty concern and criticism about establishing branch campuses and public concern over using public funds to subsidize international students rather than providing greater access to domestic students.

Knight further highlights that internationalization consists of two interdependent pillars: international-

ization at home and cross-border education. There is a tendency to prioritize cross-border education over domestic campus-based activities, which ultimately end up reaching more students. Knight argues that cross-border education is more resource intensive as it involves mobility of student, professors, staff, programs, and often requires significant financial investments: "While I do not want to cast internationalization at home as the pillar that does not require as much financial resources, I do think that it is time that more attention is given to integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension into the curriculum and especially the teaching and learning process. This requires the commitment of a critical mass of faculty who are willing to infuse an international and comparative perspective into their interactions with students. Of course, it is imperative to have a senior leadership that values the importance of preparing students with the skills, values and critical perspectives to live and work productively in the increasingly interactive world even if they never leave their home community or country."

Knight also identified several other "unintended consequences" of internationalization: a movement from collaboration to competition, a movement from mutual benefits to self-interest, movement from exchange to commercialization, and movement from capacity building to status building. "I fundamentally believe that not devoting the time to the task of self-reflection is like being too busy driving without stopping for gas," Knight said.

Jeffrey Riedinger, dean of international studies and programs at Michigan State University (MSU) and one of the moderators of the 2011 NAFSA leadership symposium, says Knight provided a good reminder of how important it is to constantly reevaluate institutional priorities: "In a world where we are all in a big rush to do comprehensive internationalization, reminding oneself regularly that there are unintended consequences to every action, no matter how well intentioned, and we need to be mindful of those and constantly checking first principles. Why were we doing this in the first place and have we lost sight of that goal in our rush to implement?"

Becoming a Successful International Leader

So how do leaders promoting global ideals on their campuses successfully go about meeting the challenges of internationalization outlined by Knight? Matthew Hartley, associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and expert in academic governance, broke down several steps for successful organizational leadership that might help high-level administrators address Knight's "unintended consequences" of internationalization. He argues that any ideal that is to become a campus priority must be embedded within the institutional fabric of a university.

"The first thing a leader has to do is engage others in creating a shared and compelling rationale for the ideal. In other words, people need a reason to get behind something. So to say it's really important for students to gain an understanding of other cultures and places, that's fine, but why, and why in this particular context? Those rationales have to be developed in the specific institutional context," he says.

"Leaders have the ability to convene people. A dean or a vice president has a position within the institution to be able to bring people together and discuss whether this actually fits and if so, why," he says.

Another area where leadership plays a role is in determining where and how a new student or prospective faculty member first comes into contact with the ideal in question, in this case, internationalization.

"The second way that leaders play a really important role is that they are the ones who are most responsible for essentially creating a socialization process for people at the institution," Hartley says.

"Is this an ideal that people hear about? Is it an ideal that they are asked to talk about when they are being interviewed? It also has to be anchored in these various policies and processes. For example, in people's annual reviews, are they asked to speak about contributions they've made in this area? Is it an issue for faculty in terms of promotion and tenure? Leaders need to think about all of the different ways in which people are exposed to those issues because those send signals that this is important at this institution."

Hartley says leaders also need to adapt their messages and strategies over time to successfully maintain support for whatever ideal they are promoting. Messages that resonated a decade ago may no longer be relevant even if the ideal still is, as Knight demonstrated with her discussion of the evolution of "internationalization" over the last several decades. Ideally, having these tough conversations will "unhinge expectations and allow realignment of academic priorities."

According to Hartley, leaders have an important stake in guiding and adapting larger institutional conversations. Ultimately, the key question that needs to

be answered is: "What core education purpose is being served by these initiatives?"

Concerns About Internationalization

International leaders consequently need to assess the core educational purposes of their international activities. For example, Knight identified an increased focus on commercialization as one of the areas where leaders need to carefully scrutinize their motivations. She is concerned about internationalization pursued for the sake of short-term financial gain from tuition dollars. "It is myth that internationalization is a cash cow. For those institutions that are overly dependent on the soft revenue of international education they are putting themselves at risk. At best, some internationalization strategies are cost neutral but integrating an international dimension in the teaching/learning, research, and community engagement usually requires considerable investment of time, human resources, as well as some funding."

As Carl Amrhein, provost and vice president at the University of Alberta also points out, "you shouldn't expect to make huge amounts of money for the institution. Properly constructed international activity is expensive, and as much money as possible should be delivered back to the people who work directly with the students. If you don't provide the support mechanisms, you might be successful in the short run but there are ethical questions about taking care of the students and providing the support that they need."

Hartley backs up Knight's and Amrhein's claim that institutions pursuing short-term strategies are setting themselves up for failure and risk damaging their academic integrity: "Institutions are resource starved, and there is increased pressure to find them by whatever means necessary. There are real dangers to doing that because it can distort your mission. There is research that shows that institutions that pursue strategies based on expediency do not do as well as institutions that have clear missions."

Finally, Hartley says that institutions need to build structures with appropriate staff and centers that can support these kinds of activities. Support structures must be in place because initiatives "built off the backs of individuals" easily dissipate and vanish.

He says the biggest challenge is figuring out "how these ideals get embedded in particular institutions, which depends on who they are and what they believe." Hartley points to contingency theory, which holds that there is no single best organizational form or structure. "Two influential organizational theorists from Harvard Business School, Lawrence and Lorsch, looked at how corporations were structured, and they tried to find out the best structure. Their major finding was 'it depends'. Essentially, there is no best way but there are trade-offs for different kinds of structures," he explains.

"Centralization might be super efficient because there is one center where all the resources go and things get coordinated, and one could imagine that in the setting of a smaller institution. That may not make sense at a much larger research institution where you have different schools that are almost different universes. There you might want to have a series of hubs, but have the people who run those hubs come together periodically and share ideas and make sure there is no duplication of effort."

In the international education field, this might mean a centralized international affairs office where the same staff are responsible for everything from international student admissions to study abroad for domestic students. One benefit to come from this is integration and interaction between incoming and outgoing students. At the same time, a decentralized model might allow individual programs to more flexibly adapt their own admissions requirements and recruitment strategies to attract particular student populations to attain greater diversity.

Buy-in From Faculty Essential to Successful Internationalization

Regardless of the particular organizational model or institution type, however, experts agree that buy-in from faculty is essential to successfully implementing internationalization on any campus.

For her part, Knight argues that faculty are the "most important engines of internationalization." "They are the champions of internationalization in the teaching/learning process inside the classroom, in research labs, in community internships and in campus co-curricular activities. To embed an international and intercultural ethos in a HEI requires that there is a critical mass of faculty on board to encourage and nurture international and intercultural perspectives, skills, and values with students, staff, and colleagues," she says.

Hartley reiterates this stance, though he adds "you don't need a majority to enact change, just a critical mass."

Just as Hartley mentions that successful leaders give their audience "ownership." Knight also emphasizes that internationalization has to be a campus-wide priority supported by faculty: "If internationalization is

seen as the purview of the international office or some other structure/position which has the responsibility to design, operationalize, and monitor the internationalization strategy and faculty/staff are not involved and rewarded there will be limited engagement and support for the international dimension and it will continue to be a marginalized issue."

Amrhein concurs, saying that the single biggest challenge to internationalization at University of Alberta has been getting the attention of professors:

"We work with the deans and the chairs and try to create opportunities with incentive funds attached to them. Most importantly we try to get the chairs and deans involved and make it a priority for each of the faculties and we do that by sharing some of the tuition revenue so that in addition to the academic reasons for doing it, there is a financial incentive as well."

"We also create academic incentives by embedding (internationalization) in the academic plan, and we make program funds available. And on the other side, we share revenue so they can access special purpose funds and they also share in the generic revenue. Money is not sufficient but it's necessary. The academic vision and framework in which this is situated have to be there as well," he says.

At MSU, Riedinger discusses the same issue not only in terms of creating incentives for faculty to engage in international activities but also removing the disincentives for doing so. "What I have to remember is that there is no particular reason why faculty should privilege international research over domestic. I have to…persuade them that there will be greater scholarly impact and impact on human well being if they situate the research they want to do in a global context rather than in a purely domestic context. Then it's incumbent upon my team to reduce the transaction costs to help them connect with other faculty across campus and around the world who are similarly interested and engaged," he says.

Riedinger can help hire a new faculty member with the stipulation that he or she be internationally engaged, which is funded three ways—with a third of funding from the provost's office, a third from his own funds, and a third from the department.

"I can use a relatively modest amount of money and leverage it for a whole series of conversations across campus. The department identifies a research domain, runs that search, and finds the best candidate they can. If the candidate happens to do that research in international space and in a country we are otherwise heavily engaged in, then I am at the table with this matching funding up to three years. It gives me a seat in the table during their performance reviews for the first three years to make sure they are on the right track for international research and engagement," he says.

Another program that has been particularly successful precisely because it is faculty-driven is Whitman College's Global Studies Initiative, introduced earlier in this article. "Our approach to global studies has been faculty-generated and faculty-driven… its success stems in large measure from the fact that, from its very beginning, it has stemmed from and been sustained by faculty initiative," says Kaufman-Osborn.

The GSI includes several faculty development opportunities, including a semester-long Global Studies Faculty Development Seminar, which brings together faculty members from diverse disciplines that are already engaged in global studies as well as the integration of global issues into their courses and research agendas. Another program is the Global Studies Summer Workshop, a one-week workshop aimed at introducing global themes and issues to faculty who are not necessarily involved with these issues in their own departments, but who are interested in discussing how global perspectives might be introduced into their own teaching.

The GSI is an example of how a fairly focused internationalization campaign can have a widespread impact across campus—and faculty are at the center. "As a result of these seminars and workshops, by the end of the three-year Mellon Foundation grant period in 2012, nearly half of our faculty will have participated in the Global Studies Initiative through the faculty development seminars or the summer workshops, and we will have developed and offered six new interdisciplinary, team-taught courses in global studies. As a result of these faculty development opportunities, over the course of the next four years, about ten percent of the Whitman student body will have taken collaboratively taught courses on topics organized specifically around an interdisciplinary approach to globalization," Kaufman-Osborn says.

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer who writes frequently about international higher education. She is a former Fulbright scholarship recipient (for study in Sweden) and adjunct instructor at Seattle University.