Engaging Stakeholders in Internationalization: Strategies for Collaboration

BY CHARLOTTE WEST
About NAFSA
NAFSA is an association of individuals worldwide advancing international education and exchange and global workforce development. 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.

Notice of Liability
The information in these documents is distributed on an “As is” basis, without warranty. While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of each document, neither the submitter(s) nor NAFSA shall have any liability to any persons nor entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in any of these documents. Please note that while NAFSA verified the website links included in this e-Publication, NAFSA cannot guarantee that every link will be current at the time of download.

Acceptable Use Guidelines
Electronic resources are provided for the benefit of the international education community. However, commercial use, systematic or excessive downloading, and electronic redistribution of these publications are all expressly prohibited.

Released 2012.

© 2012 NAFSA: Association of International Educators. All rights reserved.
While internationalization efforts at institutions often emanate from international programs or global affairs offices, there are often many more stakeholders on campus and in the local community who are interested in and involved with international initiatives that can support broader internationalization goals. Engaging these actors can foster collaboration that leads to organizational change and the development of structures to support comprehensive internationalization. Senior leaders, for instance, have the power to start conversations between diverse parties—ranging from faculty and staff to members of the local community and external organizations—to create networks and communities of practice that support campus-wide internationalization efforts, says Adrianna Kezar, associate professor for higher education at the University of Southern California.

However, collaboration that leads to organizational change need not come from the top. More often, it starts with developing common values that support internationalization.

At the May 2012 Symposium on Leadership at the NAFSA Annual Conference in Houston, Kezar, along with Christian Bode, retired secretary general of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), outlined several strategies for successful internal and external collaboration with actors who can contribute to, and help support, comprehensive internationalization. Kezar’s proposals include connecting internationalization to the underlying values of the institution, creating integrating structures that help bring people together across disciplines, developing reward structures that encourage international engagement, and publicizing successful examples which have lead to concrete results.

The symposium then continued with a variety of examples, presented below, of strategic engagement with internal and external stakeholders—including faculty, administration, municipal authorities, foundations, businesses, and the federal government.

**The benefits and challenges of collaboration: Internal stakeholders**

When aiming to implement comprehensive internationalization at colleges and universities, the benefits of engaging multiple stakeholders are manifold. “Collaboration leads to better ideas and innovation on campus. You will find better solutions to those hard ideas you are wrestling with,” said Kezar.

However, she argues university environments are not necessarily conducive to collaboration. Institutions are characterized by what she calls “siloed and bureaucratic structures.” Loose coupling makes coordinated efforts across departments difficult. Even within departments, collaboration is not often rewarded, as it’s not typically linked to tenure and promotion systems.

Other examples of impediments to collaboration include divisions between student and academic affairs, and culture clashes between staff and administration.

People are more willing to get involved, Kezar says, when leadership can connect its goals with common values—such as being student-centered—and recommends building social networks and “communities of practice” around issues with which you are seeking engagement. “Campuses that care,” she says, “have conversation and dialogue about educational goals and campus leadership.”

With internationalization, Kezar says, “You should really frontload the relationship-building efforts and work on the common vision around how internationalization helps in meeting the objectives of faculty, staff and the institution as it relates to student learning. You start by building relationships with those who are closer to the issue, and build out from there and use their networks.”

However, it's important to keep in mind that even stakeholders who are engaged with international issues may not be working with the same definition of “internationalization,” let alone “comprehensive internationalization.” As former DAAD secretary general Christian Bode expressed, “Internationalization is about managing differences intelligently.” A professor of comparative politics might have a different take on the concept than a staff member working with study abroad or international student services. Campus lead-
ers seeking change can benefit from being mindful to such differences.

Another strategy for getting internal stakeholders to understand the value of internationalization is to make existing collaborations more visible.

“You should promote the programs you have that involve different groups,” Kezar says. “We tend to focus on the program itself, not on the broad stakeholder involvement that leads to that collaboration. I recommend marketing the success of a particular program so people see the tangible results. For example, ‘We have this additional benefit for students,’ or ‘this kind of professional development for faculty.’”

Another idea is to link internal goals with external actors, she explains, citing the National Science Foundation as an example of a body that will not give grants unless you are collaborating across institutions and departments. “Bring external messages back to campus to support your own collaboration,” she suggests.

Most of the strategies listed above are effective in cases where senior leadership is already on board. However, in cases where organizational redesign is not feasible, Kezar says there is still a lot that can be done.

“From the top, you have access to the reward and incentive structures for the institution and can create some nice carrots. You can provide seed money and create energy and enthusiasm. However, too often leaders talk about these issues but don’t provide the infrastructure, rewards, and resources to do it. It’s important to remember that leadership is multi-level so redesign doesn’t only have to be from the top down,” Kezar explains.

Many of the same strategies work for building collaboration from the bottom-up. In this case, faculty and staff members within individual departments or offices can use and build on successful models such as first-year experience courses, learning communities, undergraduate research and service learning, building relationships across campus, and capitalizing on chance opportunities (see sidebar).

**Building relationships: Take external stakeholders out for coffee**

DAAD has an organizational model that has been built upon developing relationships with various external stakeholders: public sector, business, media, and civil society at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Christian Bode’s advice is to “analyze stakeholders and their priorities,” and “customize your message” to align your objectives with theirs. Similarly, Kezar suggests “connecting to whatever is important to stakeholders.”

When dealing with potential collaborators, Bode reminds us to “gather intelligence” and “investigate who you are talking to—invite them for coffee” when trying to build a relationship. Especially when dealing with engaging stakeholders who are in higher positions. “Don’t be too idealistic, but never forget that you are an idealist,” he says.

But as Kezar pointed out, too, leadership doesn’t necessarily come from the top. “Successful lobbying involves the lower levels of the organization,” Bode says.

Bode also suggests getting creative when seeking partners. For an organization such as DAAD, collaborations related to international education aren’t necessarily exclusively with the Ministry of Education and Research. He cited an example of DAAD working with the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to award and recognize German universities that were engaged with international development.

“Seek appropriate networks, and let others who may have further reach speak for you when appropriate,” he says.

Kezar expands on this idea by explaining it’s important to do due diligence on potential external partners.
Both parties need to get something out of the collaboration, or it can quickly disintegrate. She also reiterates the importance of building a shared vision, regardless of whether you are dealing with internal or external stakeholders. Building structures and processes for decision-making and accountability are important.

“People don’t think about infrastructure, and then there is some breach of trust if the supporting structures are not there,” she says. “Collaborations are going to be built on existing relationships, but it is important to do research to make sure it’s a good fit in terms of mutual benefit.”

Corporate partnerships: International collaboration to support local businesses
The Ohio State University (OSU) is an example of an institution that has successfully collaborated with an external partner in the private sector. As a result of contact with an alumnus in Shanghai, OSU has partnered with Philips Healthcare China in the field of biomedical engineering. The collaboration is part of OSU’s Gateway Strategy, which provides a platform to support OSU’s academic mission, faculty engagement, and corporate partnerships in countries where it already has close ties through the establishment of overseas offices. One component is the Corporate Partnership Program, which helps Ohio-based companies become more engaged in markets like China.

“The senior leadership, including the provost, president, and board of trustees, embraced the Gateway Strategy...They particularly like the corporate partnership dimension, for it demonstrates Ohio State’s commitment as a land-grant university serving the stakeholders of the state of Ohio, and it holds potential to be revenue generating to assist in offsetting the costs of the gateway office in China,” says William Brustein, vice provost for global strategies and international affairs.

He says the fledgling partnership has already led to internships and job opportunities for OSU students, a business partnership for the Wright Center of Innovation in Biomedical Imaging in the OSU College of Medicine, increased business opportunities and investment by Philips Healthcare in Ohio, and the establishment of a joint Ohio state-funded university biostatistics center and a forthcoming dual degree between Ohio State and Shanghai Jiao-tong University.

Brustein says that one of the challenges of working with the private sector is that universities are not as nimble as corporations.

“Our major challenge establishing partnerships with the corporate community overseas is that when a corporation makes a decision to move forward, they expect the university to react as quickly,” he said.

He advises institutions interested in seeking corporate partnership abroad to be aware of governmental regulations both in the U.S. and overseas when developing corporate partnerships, especially if intellectual property and revenue generation are part of the equation.

National government: Preparing students for international service
External stakeholders may not only be found in the private sector. In 2008, the Peace Corps announced it was encouraging campus leaders to explore partnership opportunities that would prepare students for service with the program. One of these was the Peace Corps Preparatory Program, which gives undergraduate students training for the Peace Corps through academic coursework and other experiential learning based on community service and/or study abroad. After being piloted at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois in 2010, the preparatory program was launched at several other campuses, including North Georgia College & State University in 2011. The campus decided to run the program through the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at the behest of interested faculty and staff who were former Peace Corps volunteers. At North Georgia, the program consists of eight courses and an additional community service, volunteer service, internship, or study abroad experience.

“We feel that (the partnership) fills a unique need for our students and aids in the competitiveness of their applications for the Peace Corps,” says Dlynn Armstrong-Williams, head of North Georgia’s Department of Political Science and International Affairs.

Armstrong-Williams adds it is important to have the involvement of the departments who will be offering the coursework. “My advice for other institutions would be to work elements of the program into pre-existing curriculum where possible. Also, keep the administration of the program as close as possible to the curricular home of the courses, which are part of the program,” she said.

On-campus collaboration: Engaging faculty through international experience
Juniata College, a 2012 Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization winner in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, has successfully involved faculty in a number of international projects. Jenifer Cushman,
the dean of Juniata College Center for International Education, has subsequently provided significant financial support to help faculty travel and explore possible partner sites, in addition to matching faculty with possible partner programs in their field. As the result of a presidential task force on internationalization, Juniata published its Global Engagement Initiative in 2009, which identifies clear priorities and new responses to the institutional mission to empower students for “service and ethical leadership in the global community.” Faculty involvement has been central to this mission.

Gerald Kruse, professor of information technology, computer science, and mathematics, was one faculty member who became a passionate advocate of internationalization after participating in a faculty exchange to Münster University of Applied Sciences in Germany. “With a PhD in applied mathematics, and no previous international experiences, I was hired to teach math and computer science, and so I was a passive supporter of international experiences for undergraduates, without really understanding what that meant. That changed after I had the opportunity to participate in a faculty exchange,” Kruse says.

After packing up his family, swapping houses with his German faculty partner and spending a semester abroad, Kruse says his “experience was so positive and life-altering for us that I returned to campus energized, and more completely appreciating the value of study abroad."

Kruse reiterates the importance of international experience for faculty buy-in. “For this type of exchange and experience, it must be faculty-driven. A top-down approach to starting this would seem to not be as sustainable,” he says.

Cushman adds this kind of collaboration with faculty boosts faculty engagement and advising for both study abroad and international students. She also adds, “When articulating cross-campus vision statements such as the Global Engagement Initiative, it is crucial to keep student learning at the center of the discussion.”

Municipal governments: Building on existing relationships

One of the mandates of the City of San Antonio’s international relations office is to work with local organizations in the community that have “international related” activities, including higher education institutions. They work with and promote official relationships with sister cities in other countries, and try to involve higher educational institutions in initiatives, including trade delegations, which may be beneficial.

“The department serves as the city's official foreign affairs liaison with the diplomatic corps, government, educational, and cultural organizations. We advise elected city officials, department representatives, and the business community on international protocol and provide training on cross-cultural communications and etiquette,” says Sherry Dowlatshahi, chief of protocol.

One of the institutions the city works with is the University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA). As a result of working with the city’s international relations office, UTSA has developed close relationships with institutions in various sister cities. “(The partnership) has facilitated connections for faculty especially in respective research areas, and it has benefitted students who have taken advantage of the study abroad components, such as with the University of Kumamoto in Japan,” says Julius Giribou, UTSA executive vice provost.

He advises other institutions interested in working more closely with local government to explore existing programs: “Find out about the sister cities programs of your municipality, and explore the educational possibilities in those cities. Then identify critical individuals in each setting who can build a collaborative relationship and facilitate communication.”

Dowlatshahi reiterates that leaders in charge of international initiatives should seek out the entity within the municipal government structure that manages international relations. “Networking is key here, as it leads to relationship building,” she says.

University foundations: Relationship management with external donors

The University of North Texas Foundation is an example of how collaboration between university leadership and foundations can be a catalyst for globalization. University foundations help raise and manage private resources from public, private, and individual donors in support of public institutions of higher education. A university foundation can help manage the relationship with external stakeholders (donors), assist with fund raising, manage resources, and oversee the use of funds.

Run by an independent board, the foundation interacts with the university through program-based development officers, who work with administrators and faculty. UNT, for instance, hired a development officer to focus on fundraising to support international programs.

Collaboration with the university foundation has benefitted both students and faculty. “Our students have benefitted greatly from this arrangement since most scholarships and student grants are generated through
this partnership. In addition, several funds have been created within the university and made available to support faculty international activities in a competitive basis,” says Gabriel Carranza, assistant vice provost for global engagement at UNT.

“My advice to my colleagues in international programs is to get closer to their university foundation and engage in joint planning for fundraising activities. For those universities who do not have a foundation yet, I would suggest to start discussions on the benefits for the institution,” he adds.

Community colleges: Flexible models for external collaboration
The Lone Star College System in Houston, Texas has adopted a flexible model to develop partnerships with a variety of external stakeholders, including foreign governments and agencies. They have developed a number of customized programs for foreign governments and agencies that have included establishing workforce training centers, a 2+2 program in partnership with a foreign university, and ESL training.

In Vietnam, almost a third of the population is under 25, and many are unable to afford a university education. In response, representatives of Lone Star met with local and multinational companies to assess current and future skills trends, in order to develop programs that will give students the qualifications and proficiencies they need to start careers and later complete a higher education. “We learned that IT technicians, business management and communication programs, welding, ESL, etc., were in demand,” says Nithyanantha Sevanthinathan, executive director of international programs and services.

“In Brazil, we are currently exploring ESL and oil and gas programs for U.S. companies interested in a sustainable investment in that country,” he added.

Sevanthinathan encourages other institutions, especially community colleges, to explore opportunities in their local economy. A flexible, out-of-the-box approach will allow institutions to capitalize on unexpected opportunities. “If you explore your local economy, you will be pleasantly surprised how engaged they are in the global trade,” he says. “Study them in the global market. Provide them some relevant tools for the success in your market as well as in the global arena.”

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle who writes frequently about international higher education. She is a former Fulbright scholar to Sweden.