

**REPORTING ON INTERNATIONALIZATION
AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

ISSUE ONE

*The President's Role
in Driving Internationalization*

**MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY**



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The President's Role in Driving Internationalization

Rare is it to find a community college president who will claim a high level of competence in leading internationalization. In an accountability and data driven environment, the metrics available to substantiate or refute such a claim are limited. Measures available are focused primarily on student mobility, making it too easy to equate mobility with comprehensive internationalization. With less than 1% of community college students studying abroad, and less than 1% of community college campuses being made up of international students, such approaches would fail to provide meaningful data on the process and incremental nature of internationalization. This scenario can also lead to false conclusions when trying to identify colleges and presidents who represent best practices in internationalization. While mobility is important, it is just one component in a comprehensive approach, and often international student numbers reflect natural populations or geography rather than any deliberate plan. Others might instead equate success in international programs with revenue, which experienced presidents will warn is not the reason to get into internationalization nor a sole way to measure success. For example, a college may profit from an international contract, but if the project and its revenue do not filter down to expand global learning opportunities for domestic students or faculty, to what extent can it be considered part of an internationalization strategy?

Research shows that, overall, community colleges are not internationalizing in any significant way. The American Council on Education's (ACE) Mapping Internationalization on U.S.

Campuses Project reveals that 61% of community colleges were ranked low on overall internationalization, while none were high. Eighty-six percent of the responding institutions scored zero to low or medium on organizational infrastructure for international education, 58% had a zero for external funding for internationalization, 75% rated a zero or low on investment in faculty international education, and 71% scored low on international students or student programs. These figures were gathered from 233 of the 1132 community colleges in the US. While the 20% response rate achieved is generally considered a good response, those who responded for this survey were most likely to have someone in a position to respond to questions regarding international programs, which already puts these colleges in the minority. A broader response rate would most likely provide even more dismal results. The ACE report goes on to state: "Given that approximately 40% of U.S. undergraduates attend associate institutions, developing and sharing successful internationalization models and strategies for these institutions should be a priority for the U.S. higher education community going forward. In addressing this challenge, it will be important to move beyond models that have worked for more traditional student populations. Finding ways to bring global learning to non-traditional students should be seen as an essential aspect of providing quality education to all students, and as an important element in America's higher education attainment agenda" (ACE 2012, p.24).

Despite this advice, international experience is not part of the skill-set required to become a community college president or to keep the job. Nor do presidents receive particular accolades for a job well done in this area. In fact, some prefer to keep success in this

area low key, fearing that constituents who have not updated their definition of "community" to reflect its global nature may question allocating resources toward such efforts. Even on campus there are often many challenges to overcome as faculty and staff may not readily see the relevance of "global" in their jobs or in their ability to contribute to this effort. Add to this the tension from expanding and competing priorities for leadership, faculty and staff, and internationalization gets pushed further down the list of priorities.

Another reality is that community college internationalization doesn't command enough attention in the academic literature. While international education organizations and a handful of experts around the world have published a respectable and growing amount of articles on higher education internationalization, community colleges are rarely the focus. Information that does include community colleges usually focuses on student mobility, not on the broader challenges and needs of community college presidents. A search of dissertations on community colleges and international programs yields less than 30 results, with almost all related to study abroad.

Even more disappointing is the lack of available training or guidance for presidents in this arena. Graduate programs, particularly those focused on higher education, do not include courses on the subject, nor do the leadership programs for aspiring or sitting presidents that are offered by national associations. One program attempting to change this is the University of Toledo's Higher Education doctoral program, designed for community college leaders, which requires a two-week international field study. The program is developed along with international partners in China and Europe so that it is more than just a visit to another country. This experience provides students the opportunity to understand other systems, take a critical look at their own institutions, and establish an international network of peers that may be helpful to them as they take on leadership positions at their colleges. Professor Ron Opp, Coordinator of the doctoral program at UT, warns his students that the field experience will

likely position them as the expert in internationalization at their institutions, as so few leaders have had this level of exposure.

Two conclusions that have emerged from the literature and landscape only underscore the challenge to college presidents: 1) a universally accepted definition of internationalization does not exist, and 2) the president is perceived as one of the most powerful influences on community colleges', strategic planning and action for internationalization. While studies from organizations such as NAFSA, ACE, and IIE make vital contributions to the field,

particularly in reporting on trends, community college presidents need practical advice on how to design and implement an internationalization strategy that is appropriate for their specific community. And more importantly they need someone to answer the question: Where do I start?

A review of the literature, conference proceedings, presentations, and conversations with presidents and professionals in community college internationalization suggests a three-tiered approach to answering this question. A

president must consider personal, community, and institutional conditions before embarking on the journey.

At the Personal Level

There is a resounding "just go!" attitude among college presidents who believe that a college president needs to "get it" when it comes to the internationalization at their institutions. A president must address his/her own perceptions and knowledge gaps in the understanding of globalization at the global, national, and local levels to see that internationalization is of no less importance than any other initiative on campus. This includes reading, listening, and engaging. Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea, president of Mott Community College (MI), emphasizes, "It comes down to a very personal conviction that it is the right thing to do for your students." A president needs to be able to articulate this conviction, particularly in the midst of controversy, should one arise. "The learning curve is a big one," adds Walker-Griffea. "What you don't

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know will be your downfall. Simply traveling across an ocean and signing an MOU does nothing. You need to understand expectations and cultural norms when it comes to communication and decision making.” While at Montgomery Community College (MD), Dr. Walker-Griffea was charged with an initiative to engage the large Ethiopian population. To do so, she not only held conversations



Dr. Beverly Walker-Griffea, President of Mott Community College (MI)

with local residents but also traveled to Ethiopia. It was important for her to meet with, understand, and listen to this population. This opportunity proved to be a transformative learning experience for her, and it also allowed the college to make important connections in Ethiopia. Once in country, she got a much better understanding of the culture, which was key in creating the expectations for the initiative back in Maryland. That process has taught her how to approach other opportunities.

“While each culture has its own rhythm, I now know what questions to ask. I know how to recognize what is not being said, and I’m aware to not make assumptions based on the American way.”

A sure way to achieve this level of confidence is to experience the transformative nature of an appropriately structured experience abroad, which should not be limited to being part of a delegation of presidents who stay in luxury hotels and remain with their American colleagues. While this can be educational, it does not accurately reflect the desired student experience, which should entail getting to know people by working, learning, and living beside them. The president needs to experience that certain level

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of discomfort one gets when immersed in another culture in order to have an appreciation for another way of thinking and communicating.

Dr. Dan Phelan, President of Jackson College (MI) adds that he wishes he could take his entire



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community to Beijing so all could see what is happening in China and why it matters to students, to everyone, in the U.S. While this is not possible, a president is challenged as a leader to get everyone else dialed in. It requires having the conversations, sometimes difficult ones, in the community, as well as with faculty. “The president needs to understand and be prepared to offer the commitments needed for faculty and staff to execute the vision,” adds Phelan, who is also adamant that both cultural and economic development aspects are included in the internationalization conversation.

While there are many organizations that offer structured educational, cultural, or volunteer opportunities, presidents could benefit from selecting an experience that reflects his or her local community. Perhaps it’s an opportunity to learn more about an immigrant or marginalized culture within the home community. It may also be a chance to visit a foreign office of a local business or government agency to identify economic development opportunities or locations for faculty and students to visit to hone language and cultural skills.

At a minimum, presidents should select an experience that demands stepping out of their comfort zones. A good dose of cognitive dissonance coupled with reflection will help them to understand what their faculty and students will experience. They will gain a new level of respect, particularly when they ask students to step out of their comfort zones. To convert, presidents must be one of the converted and be prepared to stand their

ground with authenticity and their own story of transformation. Data and lip service are not nearly as persuasive.

At the Community Level

Presidents and faculty are accustomed to responding to the needs of their communities, and the process should be no different when it comes to incorporating global learning outcomes into the curriculum.

Terra State Community College’s (OH) strategic planning process for its Vision 2016 included a series of 32 listening and learning sessions with community groups to determine 10 trends that are impacting higher education. The college reviewed the input to identify the top trends, and globalization emerged as one of the priorities. The college then went back to business and industry leaders to report these findings and ask “are we on target?” All agreed that topics such as diversity and the changing workforce were top priorities for them. Particularly in Terra State’s community, which was hit terribly by the recession, people had only to look around them to see that the businesses that survived were those engaged in the global market. Throughout the strategic planning process this message was heard over and over again from stakeholders. This data was shared on a public website so anyone could see the results. From the data came five main goals and 20 action items. The fervent comments on the topic of globalization positioned it as one of the five goals, which later read: “Provide dynamic opportunities for life and work in a global economy.”

In Terra’s case, global became a priority as a grassroots initiative from the external stakeholders, rather than one that was perceived to be a pet project of the president, as sometimes occurs. This factor made it real to the college’s internal team. They had to understand its importance and their responsibility to react to it. Consequently, the college’s mission and vision statements now include the words “global community.”

Terra State’s President, Dr. Jerome Webster, does not consider himself an expert on internationalization, though he always knew it was important. His experience at a university that had many international students provided him with insight as to the value of

a diverse study body. His background in student affairs also armed him with the knowledge that a college must be fully prepared to welcome international students on campus before doing so. His campus is not diverse, nor prepared to become so overnight. Dr. Webster knew he needed to be intentional about internationalization. Once his board approved the revised mission statement, he knew he was going to be held accountable for upholding it, so he became comfortable pushing others to advance the global agenda. He appointed a Director of Global Education, even as he



Dr. Jerome Webster, President of Terra State Community College (OH)

had to cut other positions, as he knew this person was needed to maintain momentum toward the strategic goal. His advice to other presidents is simple: “Just have the conversations with your stakeholders. It is not as difficult as people make it out to be, but it does require patience.” Terra’s process revealed that local competencies are the same as global competencies

and tuning in to what employers want, as colleges are accustomed to doing, will build a natural case for global initiatives.

At the Institutional Level

Once presidents have internalized their personal conviction for driving internationalization, and once their stakeholders have armed them with the case for integrating global competencies into the college’s mission and strategic plan, they must assess what their college staff is able and willing to contribute toward this goal. Presidents cannot do this on their own. It requires proper infrastructure. The following are two key attributes evident at colleges that have achieved progress toward internationalization.

First, there is a person designated to internationalization, ideally at least one FTE, but often this is .5 FTE or less. Regardless, there needs to be a point person who either already possesses the skills to carry out this role or who has the passion to do so

but requires some additional training. Presidents should be ready and willing to support their champions with the professional development they need. Support includes, for example, professional development through key international education associations, release time, rewards and recognition, and international travel as necessary.

There is sometimes a perception that international education is for only an elite few, typically those who have traveled or have experience in the field. The reality is that everyone at the college, from frontline staff to faculty to economic development specialists, has a role to play.

Second, there is a global committee that represents a cross section of the college to discuss and drive this initiative. Members of this committee do not necessarily have to be experienced in global education. Rather, they need to be experts in their own areas who can ensure new learning outcomes or policies are translated to their respective divisions. There is sometimes a perception that international education is for only an elite few, typically those who have traveled or have experience in the field. The reality is that everyone at the college, from frontline staff to faculty to economic development specialists, has a role to play. They need to be given the tools, training, and exposure to gain the confidence to believe it. Visiting another college with a more developed international programs office can help in this effort. Particularly before bringing international students and scholars to campus, presidents should be sure their staff and systems are ready. It takes only one student with a bad experience to thwart all efforts to bring international visitors to a campus.

In 2012, Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) built upon research from ACE and NAFSA to create a practical framework for community college internationalization. This free resource presents a practical, qualitative overview of what the phases of internationalization look like in all parts of the college, from governance and policy to curriculum to private sector partnerships. It can be a useful tool for providing a baseline and for setting institutional goals.

Presidents admit that getting buy-in to carry out this agenda is no different than doing so for other initiatives. There will be

champions and early adapters, as well as those who will fight it all that way, reiterating the need to integrate goals into the strategic plan. Presidents should include updates on global initiatives at every opportunity to all stakeholders in order to make it commonplace among the college's functional areas. Once embedded in policy, curriculum, and practice, it becomes institutionalized. At that point, even the president's departure will not impact future students' ability to attain the competencies that a global education provides.

The Three-Pronged Approach

Particularly for presidents new to the position or institution, and/or new to the internationalization initiative, their comfort level along with the attributes of their community and institution must be considered before developing or furthering an internationalization strategy.

1. Just go. The catalyst needs to be your belief that this is important, along with the unwavering, public case you can make to support this stance. Create your own transformational experience (if you haven't had it yet) and be prepared to tell the story, passionately and repeatedly. Become familiar with relevant data and trends (global and local) to support your case.
2. Listen to your community and stakeholders and find the sweet spot between what you want to see and what the community really needs and wants from your institution. Incorporate this into your strategic plan.
3. Consider what your institution is capable of delivering and what changes need to be made, in staffing and funding, to achieve the outcomes identified in your strategic plan. This will undoubtedly be different from institution to institution, so even if you were at a college that enjoyed success in internationalization, a new post really requires that you reassess.

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