Leading the Globally Engaged Institution: New Directions, Choices, and Dilemmas

A Report from the 2012 Transatlantic Dialogue

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Leadership and Advocacy

In the summer of 2012, the 13th biennial Transatlantic Dialogue,[1] convened by the American Council on Education (ACE), the European University Association (EUA), and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), brought together more than 30 presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors of institutions in the United States, Canada, and Europe to discuss their roles in advancing internationalization at their institutions, identify common challenges, and seek solutions and input from their peers.

From the start, participants universally acknowledged that in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, institutional internationalization is a key priority. Data from the International Association of Universities (IAU) study and 2010 report *Internationalization of Higher Education: Global Trends, Regional Perspectives*[2] indicate that the Transatlantic Dialogue participants are representative of their peers around the globe in this respect. For example, 87 percent of respondents to the IAU survey reported that internationalization is mentioned in their mission statement and/or strategic plan. Seventy-eight percent indicated that internationalization had increased in importance over the past three years.

However, what internationalization means and how it plays out vary substantially by context. In some countries, a ministry of higher education or other governmental body sets priorities and defines the scope of internationalization activities; in others, institutions are on their own to develop strategies and focus their efforts. Economic circumstances and access to technology and other resources have a considerable impact on what is possible. Adding another layer of complexity, the broad definition of internationalization and the activities it entails continue to shift and expand as technological developments (e.g., massive open online courses, or MOOCs) offer new and creative ways to engage across borders.

Navigating these issues to design a timely, coherent, and implementable strategy for institutional internationalization is a formidable task for college and university leaders. Yet data indicate that their role in the process is critical: Both the 2010 IAU study and ACE's *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2012 Edition*[3] found that among institutions surveyed, the president/rector/vice chancellor was seen as the most important catalyst for institutional internationalization. In short, leadership matters.

While the Transatlantic Dialogue participants acknowledged that there is no "one size fits all" strategy for internationalization, they converged on a number of key issues that transcend national borders and institution type, and that require attention at the highest leadership level as institutions plan their paths forward. National and international level data from the aforementioned IAU and ACE studies shed further light on these issues, and provide a broader framework that complements the institutional perspectives shared by meeting participants.

Economic Pressures

Not surprisingly, the impact of the recent worldwide economic crisis weighs heavily on the minds of higher education leaders, many of whom are facing new trade-offs and considerations as they guide their institutions' internationalization efforts. Reflecting this reality, in the 2010 IAU study, "insufficient financial resources" was ranked as the most significant internal obstacle to internationalization, and "limited public and/or private funding to support internationalization efforts/to market our higher education internationally" ranked as the most important external obstacle.

1   See the "Transatlantic Dialogues" web page for more information about the program, including reports from past meetings: http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Transatlantic-Dialogues.aspx.

2   Egron-Polak, Eva, and Ross Hudson. 2010. *Internationalization of Higher Education: Global Trends, Regional Perspectives*. Paris: International Association of Universities.

3   American Council on Education. 2012. *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2012 Edition*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education. http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/2012-Mapping-Internationalization-on-U-S--Campuses.aspx.

Transatlantic Dialogue participants reported a number of specific tensions and competing priorities that have arisen in this environment of scarce resources. For example, many institutional leaders feel increasing pressure to focus on the revenue-generation aspects of internationalization, such as international student recruiting. This emphasis, they observed, can lead to a diminution or devaluing of cross-cultural understanding and capacity building, which have been traditional—and desirable—goals of internationalization and global engagement.

Participants also reported increased pressure to produce research that is specifically tailored to address local and national economic needs. This narrow focus, they observed, discourages international research partnerships, and can seriously impede the collaborative and global development of knowledge, particularly when buttressed by formalized national policies. It is also at odds with many countries' recent emphasis on creating "world class" institutions, which are defined largely by their contributions to the global knowledge exchange.

Although economic circumstances are beginning to improve in some areas, the tensions introduced in recent years are unlikely to disappear. Institutional leaders will need to find balance in their internationalization efforts—between revenue generation and broader goals, and between the obligation to meet national/local needs and the desire to compete on the world stage. Careful consideration of competing priorities and creative compromises will be critical.

Student Mobility

Student mobility—both the outward flow of students studying abroad and the inward flow of international students—has typically been a cornerstone of institutional internationalization plans. Among

respondents to the IAU survey, for example, the two internationalization activities most frequently identified as being given top priority were "outgoing mobility opportunities for students (study, internships, etc.)" and "international student exchanges and attracting international students." Sending students to other countries and populating the home campus with students from abroad, it is assumed, facilitates cross-cultural interactions and experiences that build students' global understanding and competency.

However, Transatlantic Dialogue participants noted a number of problems with relying on student mobility to facilitate international competency. First, despite institutions' reported focus on sending and receiving students, in reality, only a small percentage of students actually have an international experience as part of their education. The 2010 IAU study found, for example, that among responding institutions, nearly half (48 percent) offer the opportunity to study abroad to less than 1 percent of their undergraduate student body. And at a substantial majority (66 percent) of institutions, international students represent less than 5 percent of the total number of students enrolled. Thus, to the extent that student mobility does indeed foster international competency, it only does so for a very limited percentage of the global student population.

Second, the current economic situation is creating new hurdles for student mobility, which may lead to even lower participation rates. Government funding cuts occurring in the wake of the financial crisis have resulted in new tuition policies in some countries and historically high levels of tuition increases in others. As tuition rates have risen, so has the number of students holding jobs to pay for costs, resulting in a diminished interest in inter-

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rupting employment for education in another location. Higher tuition can also make it more difficult for institutions to compete for incoming students at the global level, particularly given the increasing availability of less-expensive online alternatives.

Finally, participants questioned the assumption that mobility in and of itself results in increased global competency. In reality, international students' circumstances can be fairly isolating, and with social media facilitating their frequent communications with friends and family in their home countries, meaningful interaction among peers from different countries can be limited. Without adequate academic and social support, international students may flounder and make little progress toward desired learning outcomes. Specific efforts to integrate international students and help study-abroad participants maximize their learning are needed, but often lacking as institutions attend only to recruitment and mobility statistics.

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All in all, the Transatlantic Dialogue participants agreed that while student mobility should not be overlooked as part of an internationalization strategy, it is critical for leaders to look beyond the coming and going of students, and focus on infusing an international dimension into the everyday functioning of the campus. Delivering global competence to all students will require creative and intentional initiatives and programs that involve a wide range of campus stakeholders and touch *all* aspects of the student experience.

Curriculum and Co-Curriculum

While Transatlantic Dialogue participants universally agreed that internationalizing the curriculum is a critical component of "infusing an international dimension into the everyday functioning of the campus," they also acknowledged that changing the curriculum is often a slow and cumbersome process. In Europe, for example, policies set by national ministries of education potentially impact curriculum, and can present bureaucratic challenges to reform. While Canada's central education agency does not control curriculum, there is oversight at the provincial level. And in most country contexts, there are institution-level challenges, such as faculty resistance and entrenched degree requirements, with which to contend.

In the face of these hurdles, it is perhaps unsurprising that although the intention to internationalize the curriculum is strong, the reality is more of a mixed picture. ACE's Mapping Internationalization Survey found, for example, that while more U.S. institutions are requiring undergraduates to take courses that feature global trends and issues (such as global health issues, global environmental issues, and peace studies), the percentage requiring courses that primarily feature perspectives, issues, or events from countries or areas outside the United States declined between 2006 and 2011. Curriculum internationalization, it seems, is often a case of "two steps forward, one step back."

Given the time and challenges involved in internationalizing the curriculum, Transatlantic Dialogue participants stressed that institutions should also make purposeful use of the co-curriculum to further build students' international competence. Specifically, participants mentioned creating programs to promote meaningful engagement between international and domestic students and faculty, such as speaker series focused on international topics, residence hall programming, and experiential learning opportunities. Making use of resources in the community, for example, by placing students in internships at locally situated global companies, can be an important strategy as well.

Faculty Engagement

As the drivers of teaching and research, faculty are key to institutional internationalization efforts. They design and deliver the curriculum, and along with student support staff, they are most responsible for conveying to students the knowledge and skills required for global competency.

However, faculty need to develop their own international competence in order to help students make strides in this area, and Transatlantic Dialogue participants noted a number of challenges in spurring them to do so. First, as is the case with students, relying on international mobility to build global competence is not feasible; faculty interest in working abroad (for either short- or long-term appointments) is hampered by language issues, non-transferability of pension funds, and government policies. Also at play are differences among the disciplines; the sciences are interactive internationally on the big issues of health, energy, and climate, but the humanities and social sciences often focus on national issues and cultures, meaning faculty in these areas may be less open to internationalization.

Funding, of course, is an issue for faculty as well as students. In the current financial environment, institutions simply may not have the resources available to support faculty mobility and other professional development opportunities. Likely reflective of a broader international trend, as illustrated in the chart below, ACE's mapping survey data indicate a decrease in the percentage of U.S. institutions providing funding for a variety of faculty international activities in the past few years.

Furthermore, international background and experience are increasingly valued by institutions when

they hire faculty, but among U.S. institutions, for example, that valuation is not sustained in tenure and promotion policies. ACE's mapping survey found that while 68 percent of participating institutions consider international background, experience, and interests when hiring faculty in fields that are not explicitly international, only 8 percent have guidelines specifying international work or experience as a consideration in faculty promotion and tenure decisions—an increase of only two percentage points since 2001.

Transatlantic Dialogue participants acknowledged that the need for active involvement by institutional leaders is particularly strong when it comes to engaging faculty in internationalization. It is they who

Figure 1. **Percentage of Institutions Funding International Programs and Activities for Faculty**
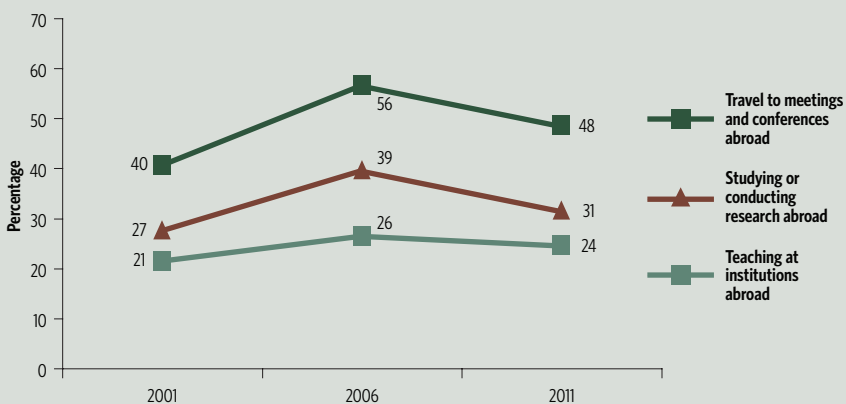
Source: American Council on Education. 2012. *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2012 Edition.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

hold primary responsibility for campus-wide policy and resource allocation; as such, they must maintain a bird's-eye view of campus operations and are in a position to see how policies in one area (e.g., faculty promotion and tenure) can impact outcomes in others (e.g., student achievement of global learning outcomes). It is critical for institutional leaders to recognize these connections, and to ensure that policies and decisions about resources—both those that are directly related to internationalization and those that are not—align to facilitate, rather than impede, internationalization goals.

Language

In the 2010 IAU study, 50 percent of responding institutions indicated that demand for foreign language learning was on the rise at their institutions, and that at a majority of institutions, English is the highest-priority foreign language for students. Transatlantic Dialogue participants observed that there has indeed been a growth of programs in English in many non-English-speaking countries, both to attract study-abroad and long-term international students, and as a means to increase revenue. However, participants also noted that these changes often occur in non-English-speaking countries with difficulty, both because of national pride and fear that the international dimension will replace the national one (something the participants rejected), and because of a shortage of English-speaking professors with the appropriate credentials.

As the non-English-speaking world is endeavoring to increase language study, conversely, the need for foreign language study in English-speaking countries is being called into question. While some argue that speaking a foreign language is key to understanding its associated culture and interacting effectively in other national contexts, many contend that because English has become the language of international business and scholarship, it is no longer necessary for native English-speaking students to gain competency in any other language. Reflecting the latter view, as the mapping survey data displayed in the chart below indicate, foreign language requirements—for students in the United States, at least—are declining. Reports of institutions dropping language programs or shuttering departments are not uncommon.

Given the combination of these data, it is perhaps unsurprising that Transatlantic Dialogue participants have found that language issues often present a significant challenge for internationalization efforts, particularly in terms of
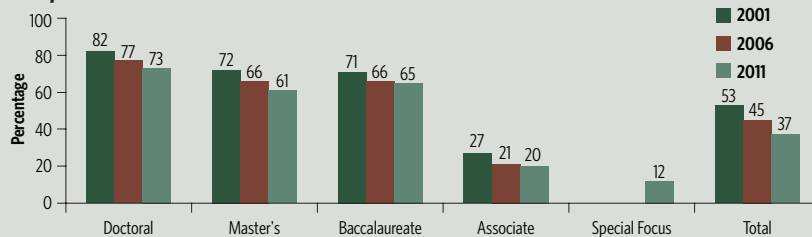
establishing collaborations across borders and ensuring international student success. Overall, fewer English-speaking students are gaining enough proficiency to interact effectively with peers abroad in a foreign language or to enroll in a non-English-based institution. At the same time, the English-language competency of students in other countries, though improving, has not yet reached the level of full academic functioning. Meaningful partnerships are hindered by a communication gap, and institutions (in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries) must scramble to provide remedial language education and other support for international students unable to keep up with coursework in their non-native language.

How to prioritize language learning and instruction is a complex issue for institutional leaders, who must weigh issues of national culture and heritage with economic considerations and practical applications. However, international teaching and research collaborations will only succeed if participants are capable of meaningful communication; international students will only succeed academically if they can understand academic content. To the extent that these areas are included in internationalization strategies, language issues must be addressed as well.

Western Attitudes and Assumptions

As more countries around the world shift from a production focus to a knowledge-based economy and society, the demand for higher education worldwide is soaring. New players (e.g., govern-

Figure 2. Percentage of Institutions with Foreign Language Graduation Requirement

Category	2001	2006	2011
Doctoral	82	77	73
Master's	72	66	61
Baccalaureate	71	66	65
Associate	27	21	20
Special Focus			12
Total	53	45	37

Source: American Council on Education. 2012. *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2012 Edition.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

ment-funded specialized institutions, private colleges, and for-profit providers) have emerged onto the scene, using a variety of delivery modes and educational models that are very different from the "traditional" Western higher education blueprint. For North American and European colleges and universities, an internationalization strategy based entirely on Western attitudes and assumptions about higher education is likely to prove unsuccessful as institutions seek to engage with the rest of the world.

The Transatlantic Dialogue participants noted a number of key areas in which Western assumptions are potentially problematic. For example, a standard measure of institutional quality in the United States is student yield, i.e., the number of applications compared with the number of admitted students who accept the offer. In countries implementing a scale-up model for higher education in order to broaden access and meet increasing demand, however, a proxy for quality that places institutions in the role of "gatekeeper" and prioritizes selectivity does not mesh with institutional and national needs. Similarly, time to degree and price points as indicators of institutional quality seem yoked to Western views of the role of higher education. North American and European colleges and universities that assess potential partners abroad by these measures may forfeit the opportunity to work with institutions that are in fact leading the way in advancing their countries' higher education agendas.

In terms of content, participants noted that some of the research themes prevalent in Western institutions are increasingly being questioned as to their universality. For example, global warming may be an acceptable theory in the West, but its implications for economic growth may hinder its acceptance in China. Research and teaching collaborations that are underpinned solely by Western theoretical frameworks and knowledge constructs are unlikely to succeed in other national contexts.

Beyond partnerships, institutional leaders at the Transatlantic Dialogue also discussed the implications of the globalization of the higher education enterprise as a whole. Traditionally, they observed, higher education institutions have done two things: impart knowledge and issue a diploma. With the emergence of online courses and alternative methods of measuring competencies, however, the connection between these two activities is increasingly called into question. Western institutions are perceived as unaffordable and inflexible, and they can no longer assume that "business as usual" will allow them to remain competitive. In order for their institutions to attract students and succeed in the global context, college and university leaders must be comprehensive in their thinking and nimble in their decision making.

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Assessing Student Learning

Preparing students to live and work in a globalized society is almost always among the stated goals for institutional internationalization. In the IAU study, "improving student preparedness for a globalized/internationalized world" was ranked as the most important rationale for internationalization by a substantial margin. A key question for leaders, therefore, is whether students at their institutions are acquiring the skills, attitudes, and competencies required to achieve this goal. These include both subject-specific skills and knowledge (i.e., skills and knowledge that are required to work in a given discipline or field) and the broader competencies needed to function in a globalized world (cultural understanding, language skills, etc.).

In the United States, many institutions are using specified "student learning outcomes" to capture and quantify student learning in particular areas, both in terms of disciplinary knowledge and these broader global competencies. In terms of the latter, ACE's mapping survey found that among U.S. institutions surveyed for the 2012 report, 55 percent reported developing specific international or globally focused student learning outcomes—an increase of 10 percentage points since the 2006 iteration of the study.

For the Transatlantic Dialogue participants, however, one of the most important recent developments for institutional leaders to watch in the area of student learning assessment deals with measuring content-area knowledge at the national level in order to facilitate international comparisons. Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), a project under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), aspires to be a global assessment of learning outcomes for students completing a bachelor's degree. According to the OECD, the project is designed to evaluate the quality of higher education through the assessment of what students

have learned, and is intended to fill a gap in current comparisons of university performance. At the time of the 2012 Transatlantic Dialogue, AHELO was testing the feasibility of measuring student learning outcomes in three areas: generic skills (critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and written communication), economics, and engineering.[4]

While the Transatlantic Dialogue participants were interested in the AHELO concept, they raised a number of questions and concerns for consideration by OECD as it moves forward with the project, and by institutional leaders as they monitor its progress and potentially consider participating. These included:

- What is the overall purpose of the project? To provide information for institutions to improve learning outcomes? To serve as a higher education ranking system?

- How will the results be used and by whom?

- How are language and cross-cultural differences accounted for by the survey instrument?

- Who will pay for its implementation?

- How will OECD get students to take the survey?

- How will faculty be involved?

- How will the implementation process be governed and reported?

- What steps will be taken to protect against misuse of the results (e.g., for the creation of spurious "rankings")?

More broadly, participants were concerned about the transparency of the AHELO development process, and the role of institutional leaders in informing its creation and implementation. They noted that institutions are structured and governed

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4   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2012. *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (AHELO). Brochure. http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/skills-beyond-school/AHELO%20Brochure.pdf.

very differently in different countries, and contextual considerations, as conveyed by institutional leaders, must be taken into account in developing a tool intended for worldwide use. Moving forward, they recommended that OECD consult closely with institutional leaders and higher education associations on issues of methodology and implementation, and keep the global higher education community up-to-date on progress and next steps.

The Role of Associations

As Transatlantic Dialogue participants looked to the future, they recognized the need for ongoing discussion and consideration of all these issues, and more broadly, of how higher education institutions can contribute to their communities, their nations, and their world. They acknowledged that the event's sponsoring organizations (ACE, AUCC, and EUA), along with other national higher education associations worldwide, can play an important role in facilitating and informing institutional decision making and advancing conversations at the leadership level. In particular, they suggested that associations should:

- Help institutions understand higher education systems abroad, with the goal of facilitating partnerships and collaborations.

- Monitor AHELO and other developments impacting higher education on a global level, and advocate for the needs and interests of institutions.

- Identify national and local government policies that potentially impede internationalization or champion change.

- Provide opportunities for institutional leaders to share internationalization strategies and best practices.

Fortunately, the 2010 IAU study suggests that higher education associations as a group are ready and willing to support internationalization; mirroring institutional trends, 82 percent of responding national associations indicated that internationalization had increased in importance in their association in the previous three years. Ultimately, it is through a sustained and collaborative effort on the part of these associations, individual institutions, and other stakeholders that the higher education enterprise as a whole will be able to advance internationalization and achieve the critical goal of preparing a generation of students for success in a globalized world.