The internationalization of an Hispanic-serving American university: finding effective research strategies for policy, structure, and curricular change

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The decision to intentionally internationalize a university campus is at once systematically complex and fully negotiable. It requires dedicated faculty, staff, students, administrators, and community members who aspire to be transformational leaders in the 21st century global community. The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) has chosen to embrace internationalization as a strategic endeavor, and this necessitates an academic community diverse in scope and linked across nations with interactive learning/teaching, research, and service. Resource availability, disciplinary paradigm shifts, critical dialogue, and structured incentives are also necessary if these initiatives are to be successful. Thoughtful development of a new design in academic and organizational structure must intentionally advance goals of developing and refining the university’s internationally-related strategic vision. Ultimately, international adult education must be concerned with ‘both the individual adult as well as development of the greater context in which adults find themselves, whether it be the nation, society, the community, an organization, or a group’ (Boucouvalas, 2005, p. 18). As Martin (2006, p. 290) argues, it must be ‘about catalysing the relationship between politics and ethics’ in which ‘the imagination as a social force works across national lines.’

The UTSA context
UTSA has a long tradition of celebrating diversity and serving historically underrepresented groups. According to its mission statement, UTSA ‘embraces multicultural traditions’ while ‘serving as a center for intellectual and creative resources as well as a catalyst for socioeconomic development for Texas, the nation and the world’ (UTSA Strategic Plan 2016, p. 5). Globalization is identified as one of UTSA’s foundational themes in its Strategic Plan. Accordingly, this paper outlines research that will help to identify a course of action that the institution will take to facilitate global learning across disciplines. These actions encompass a view toward

- An increased understanding of the unfolding process of linkage among the world’s peoples, societies, and economies that transcends regional and national boundaries;
• An improved self—and faculty—assessed ability in technological, communicative, social, and cultural knowledge and skills; and
• Enhanced practical experience that will equip individuals to lead and succeed in an ever more intensively connected world (UTSA Strategic Plan 2016).

Through internal grant funding, an International Task Force (ITF) was formed and given the charged to examine how UTSA is currently situated with respect to offering internationally-focused educational experiences and to find ways to provide these experiences for both students and community.

We know that for international education to become incorporated into the educational fiber at UTSA, the broadest possible cross-section of the institutional community must be represented in the process of change. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the research strategies and preliminary results of an internationalization evaluation study conducted at UTSA over the past year.

Theoretical framework and literature review
In order to evaluate current perspectives on international education in the academic community as well as in our local context, we based our plans in knowledge gained from research literature, multidisciplinary conceptions of internationalization, and a critical self-examination and assessment of our collective assumptions (Schoorman, 2000). We have found that in order to keep pace with an ever-changing social, political, and economic international climate, as well as to produce graduates equipped with tools to advance global social justice and human rights, institutions of higher education must prepare graduates who can successfully participate in an increasingly interdependent world (Francis, 1993). Accordingly, Czarra (2003) notes that the globalization/internationalization of curricula and student learning experiences requires all disciplines to incorporate global issues, global culture, and global connections.

Hence, to begin the process of systematized globalization, collaborative networks of faculty, students, and administrators must work toward a common working definition of globalization and of systematic structural support. Green (2003) argues that the responsibility of internationalization of higher education rests with faculty, yet requires vital support from institutional administrators. She adds that resource availability, disciplinary paradigms shifts, and structured incentives are necessary if these initiatives are to be successful.

Therefore, we viewed this study through the lens of situated cognition, which considers the contexts and influences inherent in any educational environment. Central to the theory are communities of practice, which Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as “a set of relations among person, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities . . . ” (p. 98). Within this framework, learning is viewed as a
function of the context, actions, behaviors, and culture in which it occurs. This approach does not consider learning in an isolated, decontextualized vacuum, but instead takes into account the historical, social, and cultural contexts that people bring with them to the learning setting.

To underpin our approach as well as our recommendations, we undertook an extensive literature review of four major areas: international curricula, research, scholars, and study abroad/internships. Though space limitations do not allow for a full description of each of these areas, we provide an overview here.

**International curricula**
Not surprisingly, a review of articles from the past 5 years on university-wide efforts at internationalizing curriculum yielded a substantial number of articles on initiatives led by the business colleges of both public and private universities. For-profit institutions have also made internationalized curricula their mantra. The goal, it seems, is most often profit as ‘global capital has, for the first time, heavily invested in knowledge industries worldwide, including higher education and advanced training’ (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). In a rush to compete in a global economy, many post-secondary educational efforts toward internationalized curricula have been compartmentalized, with little assessment done to determine the success of the results (Deardorff, 2006).

Government efforts to mandate internationalization of curricula and assessment, such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) in Australia (Wylie, 2008) and the globalized National Curriculum in the UK, tend to focus on ‘the desire to secure a role in this new global knowledge economy’, and often result in the ‘McDonaldization of the state education system’ (Wilkinson, 2006, pp. 82-88). According to Wilkinson (2006), these efforts ‘subjugate educational objectives to economic policy’ and can be seen in the ‘ideological shackling of education by the principles of money, the market and its managers and the prioritization of economy as a first-order value’ (p. 88). In this view, the new ‘McWorld’ (p. 88) is served internationalized curricula of efficiency, calculability, and state control (pp. 87-94). Unfortunately, these efforts look very much like the testing and accountability legislation in place in the U.S. Such systems create an environment where ‘debate about the wider purposes of education and its role within a western liberal democracy is suffocated beneath the heavy pillow of abstracted, managerialist “objectivity” and global economics’ (p. 95). Needless to say, this was not the ITF’s goal.

As Ibrahim (2005) notes, an international curriculum must draw on ‘insights from human rights education, peace education, anti-racist and multicultural education as well as development education’ (p. 178). The ITF is comprised of faculty from Adult Learning and Teaching, Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, Educational Counseling, and History. We are ‘still interested in
sustaining the links between adult education and big ideas like equity and equality’ (Martin, 2006, p. 289). As Martin (2006) points out, ‘Globalisation now calls for a more cosmopolitan framing of the issues in a way which recognizes a third dimension of justice’ (p. 289).

**International research**

In higher education there are generally two frames of cross-national research—international and globalization. International research generally focuses on specific issues within national systems of higher education. For example, Stevenson and Willot (2008) investigated the role of cultural capital theory in explaining the absence of refugees and other non-traditional students from UK higher education. Ng and Shan (2007) studied the experiences of professional Chinese immigrant women in the Canadian labor market. Each of these studies focused on issues with respect to a particular context.

Globalization research, alternatively, is ‘seen as world-wide … it is not the special product or province of one particular group, nation, or empire, but rather the joint product of the total experience of humankind…’ (Modelski, Devezas, & Thompson, 2008, p. 420). Global research activities transcend national borders and are often used to research world-wide trends and growing global issues and concerns. Globalization research is often grounded in systems thinking. Systems thinking focuses on the study of how one component interacts with another component of the system of which it is a part. Instead of isolating smaller and smaller parts of the system being studied, systems thinking works by expanding its view to take into account larger and larger numbers of interactions as an issue is being studied (Aronson, 1998). For example, Holland and Pithers (2005) investigated how issues and challenges of adult professional development were perceived by both Western and Chinese educators, and how they were jointly solved to develop more resourceful practitioners.

**International scholars**

There is no one way to be an international scholar. The history of internationalization in academe is multifaceted (Dolby & Rahman 2008), as are the experiences of faculty and student scholars whose endeavors may take the form of administrative and managerial opportunities, leadership on projects that are both local and far-reaching, teaching and curriculum amendments, study abroad, or utilizing global political, social, economic, and educational resources (Dolby & Rahman 2008; Ruther 2002). Moreover, participating in international academic conferences provides scholars with what Solomon and Zukas (2006) have termed ‘Globalising Academic Communities’ which, they assert, create a ‘ceremonial space’ (p. 372). In this international ceremonial space, scholarship is ‘played’ and ‘performed’ (p. 373), and both ‘knowledge and academic identities’ are produced (p. 377).
these activities may assist scholars to expand and enrich their critical international perspectives, practices and identities.

The expansion of a scholar’s worldview rests on his or her ability to examine self, understand others, and demonstrate proficient interpersonal skills. Deardorff (2004) focuses on this issue through the demonstration of a Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence, whereby one’s attitudes, knowledge, and skills are consistently processed to learn more about one’s self in relation to others. Requisite attitudes involve the scholar’s appreciation and respect for diverse groups, as well as his or her willingness to learn from others. Awareness of one’s personal attitudes and beliefs and their impact on the cross-cultural dynamic constitutes the knowledge and comprehension level of the pyramid. Also important here is an understanding of the salience of one’s various cultural identities, such as nationality, religious orientation, language, and family characteristics. Lastly, scholars must be willing to consistently analyze, interpret, and re-evaluate their cross-cultural interactions. Such competencies can lead to rich, complex, and insightful learning and teaching outcomes that are characteristic of the international scholar experience (Deardorff, 2004; Green & Shoenberg, 2006).

**Study abroad**

Study abroad can be defined in many ways, but for this study, we define it as any opportunity for a student to learn formally in an international locale. This may be in a short or long term program, be led by faculty at the students’ home institution or by instructors in the international setting, be unilateral or bilateral, and be offered within one or more fields of study. These programs are typically focused on the humanities and social sciences, but are increasing in fields of study including engineering, political science, business, and the sciences (Dekaney, 2008). Ultimately, study abroad programs can provide students an opportunity to learn about global diversity and the interdependence and interrelationships of local, national, and international issues affecting the world’s population today. These experiences are often significantly transforming for students and faculty alike and can be an important vehicle for attaining institutional internationalization goals.

However, good intentions do not always produce the kind of learning, development, and transformation that is intended (Gray, Murdock, & Stebbins, 2002; Green, 2007). Wu (2006) found that international students often need special assistance dealing with language issues that affect test-taking, academic assignments, and social interaction. Woolf (2007) suggests international field-based teaching has remained essentially static and curricula and instructional practices must be significantly revised to meet new global-diversity learning needs. In addition, the impact of studying abroad is not well documented and often based upon assumptions made by administrators and faculty (Dekaney, 2008). Accordingly, VandeBerg (2007) advises that the increase in study abroad enrollment (over 300% in the past
20 years) is leading governments, institutions, and faculty to focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in these programs. He stresses that if study abroad students are to learn effectively, faculty in these programs must intervene before, during and after these experiences to form and support their learning. Green, (2007) also recognizes that faculty must develop an internationalized mindset to create learning that is comparative, integrative, interdisciplinary, contextual, and global.

Research design
We employed the use of a logic model to plan, design, implement, analyze, and document knowledge generation in our initial internationalization efforts. A logic model is a relationship map for complex plans that increases intercommunity voices in planning and processes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). It visually represents the connections between our outcomes with activities, processes and theoretical assumptions/principles. Specifically, the model displays our contextual factors (resources, inputs, and barriers); our activities (internal and external best practice review, surveys, consensus building activities, site visits); our outputs (literature review, conceptual framework, current offerings and experiences, and organizational structure); our outcomes (UTSA Internationalization Status Report and Action Plan); and future impact (structural and curricular change, intercommunity collaboration) of the evaluation study. The model was essential in gaining initial support, in formative assessment, and for revising and improving the project and process.

The mixed-method evaluation approach included gathering data through multiple sources. The literature review directed the second stage of the study as we compiled a catalog of the University’s current internationalization efforts. We then conducted consensus-building activities for faculty, staff, and students on our community’s collective, international and cultural knowledge and experience. We are in the process of administering a Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) to faculty, staff, and students, which will assess current international perceptions. We also have several site visits scheduled to universities noted for their globalization efforts. This information will form the basis of the university’s Internationalization Action Plan.

Preliminary Findings
Our preliminary results have yielded some exciting discoveries as well as some glaring gaps in UTSA’s ability to achieve the internationalization goals stated in our Strategic Plan. In this section, we give a brief summary of the results thus far.

Current international activities
In addition to a careful examination of course offerings/course descriptions, individual Departments were asked to identify their internationalization/globalization efforts.
This resulted in a list of activities ranging from study-abroad, to international research projects, to invited international scholars. UTSA also sponsors two official international entities: The Asian Institute and the Mexico Center. It became clear that pockets of international educative initiatives are in place, but there is currently no method for connecting them to maximize impact. Nor were the various activities focused on providing international student experiences to a large number of students.

Consensus building activities
Consensus building activities were conducted with three groups: students (both undergraduate and graduate), faculty, and staff/administration. Consensus was built around the question: What should be the Internationalization/globalization efforts at UTSA? The results included internationalizing certain core courses, establishing partnerships with universities outside the US, advertising UTSA internationally in order to recruit international students and staff, and finding ways to offer more financial assistance to international students.

The Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI)
In order to determine the current international perspectives of a representative sample of UTSA students, faculty, and administrators, the ITF contracted to administer the Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI). The GPI is a survey instrument that measures a person's global perspective, with an emphasis on the importance of cultural influences. The GPI is currently being administered at UTSA and the results will be posted on the forthcoming website.

Discussion and recommendations
While the findings are still in their preliminary stages, the ITF has generated a lengthy list of recommendations. Here is a sample:

- Add student outcomes/impact measurements to the Study Abroad programs already in place.
- Streamline the Study Abroad Program Proposal Application.
- Create a website devoted to UTSA’s internationalization efforts.
- Reinstitute a foreign language requirement in the university core curriculum.
- Identify and foster partnerships with national and international universities that have successfully focused on international education.
- Continue to administer the Global Perspectives Inventory annually in order to monitor and assess the impact of globalization efforts.
- Offer incentives for faculty to promote international/global perspectives in research and teaching.

The complete list will soon be available on the university’s internationalization website.
Our effort to expand UTSA’s mission to encompass international perspectives across the disciplines in its infancy. It is a daunting task. However, as global exploitation of people, planet, and resources for profit rapidly expands, Martin (2006, p. 287) exhorts: ‘to sit on the fence is to take the side of the status quo’. He insists that globalization education demands ‘the willingness and capacity to think big (not least about the continuities and contradictions of globalization itself) and to confront difference in the quest for a new kind of solidarity’ (p. 290) for adult educators. This effort is an attempt to respond to his challenge to ‘think big’ and make a difference.

References


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