

INTERNATIONALIZING THE CURRICULUM: STRATEGIES AND TRENDS IN THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM

Authors:

Mary Beth Marklein and Nguyen Lan Huong

ABSTRACT

As part of Vietnam's Strategy for Education Development 2011-2020, the Ministry of Education and Training promotes the development of curricula for advanced programs that meet world-class standards for universities. Moreover, under the Law of Higher Education (2012), universities in Vietnam are encouraged to internationalize their programs, which have led to a profusion of joint projects and partnerships with foreign institutions. This presentation aims to provide practical information for all SEAMEO countries that are interested in internationalizing their curriculum by cultivating relationships with partners in the U.S. and Europe.

First, it explores the current internationalization strategy of Vietnam, including an analysis of existing partnerships involving U.S. universities and other foreign universities and student perceptions about the value of such programs. Then, using a case study, it examines why U.S. institutions have sought to internationalize their curricula, how partnerships with universities in developing countries help them address global awareness in the curriculum, and what faculty and administrators in SEAMEO countries might realistically expect to gain from such international initiatives. Finally, the speakers seek to facilitate a discussion on how SEAMEO members can develop and strengthen internationalization curricula by working with U.S. and European partners.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization of higher education is a top priority for governments around the world, but the concept can carry different meanings in different countries, particularly in curricular matters. For developing countries, internationalization tends to focus on creating a curriculum that meets world-class standards. In industrialized countries such as the United States, it tends to focus on developing intercultural competence of students. This paper aims to explore those differences in an attempt to facilitate discussion on how both goals might be achieved through innovative cross-border partnerships. First, it explores the current internationalization strategy of Vietnam. Then, using a case study, it examines why U.S. institutions have sought to internationalize their curricula, how partnerships with universities in developing countries help them address global awareness in the curriculum, and what faculty and administrators in SEAMEO countries might realistically expect to gain from such international initiatives. Finally, it provides practical information for all SEAMEO countries

that seek to cultivate relationships with international partners as they internationalizing their curriculum.

DEFINITIONS

Today, the concept of internationalization generally refers to how institutions -- in this case, institutions of higher education -- respond to globalization. Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2010) define globalization as "the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology, the emergence of an international knowledge network, [and] the role of the English language" (p. 7). The effects of globalization have had and continue to have a profound impact on higher education, chiefly because education's role in the production and dissemination of knowledge is taking on heightened importance in what is often referred to as a knowledge economy.

The response to globalization - that is, the internationalization agenda -- typically includes some sort of relationship between and among people, institutions and governments in other countries. Knight (2013) defines internationalization, whether at the national, sector, and institutional levels, as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2013, p.2). More than 20 years ago, Knight and de Wit (1995) offer several rationales for countries and institutions to internationalize their campuses and their curricula. Those rationales fall into four general categories:

- political, such as to improve or maintain public diplomacy and/or national security
- economic, such as to compete in a global workforce, to increase capacity and/or to generate new revenue streams;
- cultural goals, such as to improve cultural awareness and understanding and/or to export national, cultural and moral values
- educational, such as to expand access to libraries and improve quality of education and research.

While the rationales offered by Knight and de Wit need not be in conflict, efforts to draw such distinctions do suggest potential tensions around motivations for internationalization, as well as potential consequences, intended or unintended. Moreover, the rationales may differ for each institutional partner (or government) engaged in international collaborations.

A comparative analysis by the U.S.-based American Council on Education (2015) identifies five categories of focus for policies and programs devoted to higher education internationalization: student mobility, scholar mobility

and research collaboration, cross-border education, internationalization at home, and comprehensive internationalization strategies.

INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY IN VIETNAM

The Vietnam government has sought to internationalize its higher education system through a variety of strategies, including sending students to study overseas and borrowing more than \$1 billion USD loans to establish world-class universities. (It has set a goal to crack the top 200 world-class universities by 2020.) Under Project 322, for example, 4,600 students and faculty had been studied in 34 developed countries from 2000-2012. More recently, the Government promulgated Project 911 for period of 2010 -2020, with a goal to produce 20,000 Vietnamese PhDs overseas who will teach in Vietnam universities. Between 2002 and 2012, Project TRIG (Training and Research Improvement Grant), with a World Bank loan, was implemented to improve the teaching and research capability in some specific universities in Vietnam through short-term training courses for current faculty and researchers (Pham, 2016). In contrast to Project 322 and 911, TRIG focuses on improvement of teaching and doing research of current instructors in Vietnam universities.

The first major cross-border partnership was established in 2001, when Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University Vietnam opened its doors in Ho Chi Minh City. Today, the Australia-owned university enrolls more than 6,000 students on campuses in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. In November 2015, RMIT Vietnam signed a Memorandum of Understanding with FPT University on developing framework for cooperation in the area of English language training and higher education programs (FPT University, 2015). In addition, Vietnam has developed five world-class modeling universities in partnership with governments of other countries. Vietnamese-German University (a member of VNU – Ho Chi Minh) was established in 2008; the curricula focus on technical and engineer areas, and courses are delivered in English. The University of Sciences and Technology in Hanoi (USTH) is a similar venture with France. Vietnam-Japan University (VJU); Vietnam – British Institution of Training and Research – Danang; and, most recently, Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV), are other examples. In most cases, the curricula in these programs have been developed by foreign partnering universities to ensure they meet international standards.

Finally, Vietnam has increased the number of joint (and/or dual) programs between Vietnam institutions and foreign universities, from 27 in 2001 to 174 in 2015, according to a report issued Dec. 31, 2015, by the Vietnam International Education Department (2015). Dao (2015), in a study of such programs, found that "...100% textbooks and learning materials are in foreign language and there must have the participation of foreign students in the program in Vietnam; the curriculum imported 100% from overseas is less appealing to students" (Dao, 2015, p. n.a). In 2013, Government

Inspection reported that there were only seven (7) foreign partnering schools are in the high regional and global ranking system (Pham, 2014). Pham (2014) found that most foreign schools participating in joint programs were low-scoring schools in world rankings (less than 1000 in Webometrics), and focused primarily on business management (47,8%), and finance and banking (17,6%). The science and technology field comprised 11% of international joint programs, followed by 10,8% on technology science, 5,1% on foreign languages, 3,1% on public policy, 2,7% on law, and 1,7% on the social sciences and humanities.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR VIETNAM?

To date Vietnam has invested more than US\$1 billion USD in loans toward the development of three world-class universities in partnership with other governments. Moreover, more than 110,000 students are studying in 47 countries around the world, spending an estimated US \$3 billion a year, and a recent survey found that three in five parents in Asia would take on debt to fund their children's university education (HSBC, 2016, pp. 1-2). It is fair to ask what benefits Vietnam as a nation and Vietnamese families are getting in return from our investments. It is fair to question whether there are alternatives.

Curaj, Matei and others have examined the concept of Internationalization at Home, defining it as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments" (Curaj, et al, 2015). In other words, internationalization at home focuses on integrating international dimensions into curriculum and teaching and learning process within the existing domestic environment. To that end, 30 programs in nine Vietnamese universities invited faculty from overseas partner universities from 2007 to 2015 to participate in exchanges to improve and internationalize the curriculum. In June 2016 VNU-Hanoi' report, "a lot of advanced courses have been updated with the international trends, based on the "chuan" [good] curriculum, advancing the teaching and evaluating methodologies" (Sinh Vu – VNU Media, 2016). The concept of the internationalization of higher education was developed more than 25 years ago in Europe; today, it "has become as relevant as the traditional focus on mobility (both degree mobility and mobility as part of your home degree" (de Wit, 2010, p 5).

THE U.S. PERSPECTIVE

Many U.S. universities are eager to engage their students in international and intercultural experiences. The primary vehicle for doing so is via the curriculum. Kreber (2009) defines curriculum as "all the activities, experiences, and learning opportunities (that is, the entire teaching and learning environment) that students, academics, administrators, and support staff are part of" (p. 9). Leask (2009) homes in on the

internationalization component of the curriculum, calling it "the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the content of the curriculum as well as the teaching and learning arrangements and support services of a program of study" (p. 209). Finally, the term intercultural competence denotes the measure by which institutions might assess the effectiveness of their internationalization efforts. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (2010) has developed one rubric for this assessment.

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

George Mason University (Mason) is the largest public university in the Commonwealth of Virginia, with its main campus located in Fairfax, Va., just outside a major world capital, Washington, DC. About 2,500 of its 34,000 students are classified as international students based on their visa status; however, the large immigrant population in Northern Virginia also contributes significantly to campus diversity. In all, Mason's students represent 130 countries of origin. In 2014, it opened a branch campus in South Korea. The university also enrolls a large number of non-traditional students, including working adults who may be juggling careers and children on top of their coursework. About one-third of Mason students attend part time.

In 2013, Mason launched a strategic plan that emphasized innovative learning practices that would promote student engagement with the world. "We Are in Virginia. But We Serve the World," it announces on its web site. In its Vision Statement, Mason is described as a "university for the world" (George Mason University, 2016a).

While curricular matters are handled by faculty, the goal to internationalize requires a systemic commitment (Latz, 2016). Here, we describe Mason's approach across various domains.

While internationalizing the curriculum is the responsibility of faculty, administrative efforts to meet global goals are housed primarily in Mason's Office of Global Strategy, which "assists units, programs, faculty, and students in pursuit of international initiatives and coordinates efforts across traditional organizational boundaries" (George Mason University, 2013, p. 6). The Office lists 187 formal partnerships and memoranda of understanding (MOU) with foreign institutions, the content and structure of which vary widely.

A top priority for the office is on boosting student participation in international experiences. "Getting to 100" is how the Office's executive director, Gbemi Disu, describes the internal campaign (G. Disu, personal communication, May 17, 2016). One goal is to triple the number of students who study abroad, from 1,000 to 3,000, but the vast majority of Mason's domestic students are more likely to be exposed to other cultures through their international classmates.

In 2001, Mason introduced a general education requirement, called “Global Understanding,” as a first step toward systemic integration of global concepts into the undergraduate curriculum. In some cases, this strategy has paid off. A world history class that once focused exclusively on Western civilization is now expanding its breadth (Stearns, 2009, p. 44). Nevertheless, these courses are only as internationally focused as the faculty members who offer them, and it can be difficult to monitor how deeply they delve into issues of global understanding. The Provost's office acknowledges room to improve (J. Muir, personal communication, May 26, 2016).

The Provost's office also has added a Global Affairs major and interdisciplinary options to its academic offerings. While successful, these strategies largely attract students who already have an interest in international affairs. The campus continues to struggle with how to reach students who are not so predisposed to international-minded coursework, and to make sure they have a valuable experience (Stearns, 2015). Mason is considering the possibility of creating a program through which undergraduates who enroll in a series of globally focused courses receive a certificate designating a certain commitment to global understanding.

Mason's Office of Institutional Assessment, along with a key curriculum committee, tapped a team of graduate students to explore how Mason might update its core requirements in order to better address global learning (Dooris, Ford, Klein, Lebron & Shaw, 2015). That report, as well as a separate report by a graduate student (Yamanaka, 2015) noted the role of the co-curriculum in supporting intercultural competence goals. For example, two student-life offices at Mason bring together groups of international and domestic students to talk over dinner about topics that touch on ethics, values and cultural difference. A faculty member typically facilitates.

While Mason's general education requirement serves as leverage to encourage faculty to integrate international dimensions into their courses, faculty receive few benefits, in terms of a salary or career advancement, for doing so. The Provost's office is looking to address how it might create a promotion structure that rewards faculty, in time or money, who engage students in international-minded coursework (J. Muir, personal communication, May 26, 2016).

GLOBAL COLLABORATIVE CLASSROOM: A PROMISING MODEL

One of Mason's most promising innovations is its Global Collaborative Classroom, which involves the use of interactive technologies to connect Mason classrooms with classrooms in other countries. This model leverages outside resources so costs are minimal; students in both countries earn grades awarded by their home institutions, thereby avoiding bureaucratic challenges; and it embeds a strong global component into an existing

course, as opposed to creating a new course. Moreover, it offers a domestic option for students who cannot, for whatever reason, go abroad as part of their college experience.

In spring 2015, a pilot course was developed by social work faculty at Mason and Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi, India. The collaboration grew out of the Fulbright program through which an Indian professor spent a semester teaching at Mason. The local hosts, Drs. Emily Ihara and Cathy Tompkins, wanted to continue the relationship. Together, the instructors embedded a joint course assignment into two classes, one a senior capstone class at Mason, and the other a research methods course for Master's students at Jamia Millia Islamia. Working in small groups and with help from a \$1,000 grant used to purchase digital cameras, students documented and compared homelessness in Fairfax, Va., and New Delhi. In addition to the academic insights, the collaboration offered other cultural insights. For example, the Indian students were primarily male while Mason's students were primarily female. Scheduling issues posed the main challenges because of time zone differences. (C. Tompkins, personal communication, May 24, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following insights may prove useful for SEAMEO members who are looking for ways to work with U.S. colleagues.

- Leverage your faculty participation in the U.S. Fulbright exchange programs and other initiatives of the U.S. State Department.
- Tap into undergraduate and graduate students from your countries who are enrolled in U.S. universities; they often have good relationships with their faculty advisers and are likely to have a natural interest in some sort of exchange.
- Participate in and build off of U.S. study abroad programs that come to your country or community.
- Co-curricular options, internships, service-oriented spring break trips at U.S. universities are typically facilitated by administrative staff, who may be more open than a faculty member to collaborating.
- International education fairs (such as those sponsored by the U.S. State Department) sometimes have opportunities for local universities to network.
- The Center for Collaborative and Online Learning (COIL) at the State University of New York, for example, offers case studies of programs that are similar to Mason's Global Collaborative Classroom initiative. (<http://coil.suny.edu/>)

REFERENCES

- American Council of Education. (2015). Internationalizing Higher Education Worldwide. National Policies and Program. American Council of Education. Retrieved: <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/pages/CIGE-Insights.aspx>
- Asian Development Bank. (2014). Extended Annual Review Report Loan RMIT International University Vietnam. Retrieved adb.org/sites/default/files/project-document/149433/32914-014-xarr.pdf
- Association of American Colleges and Universities (2010.) Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Value Rubric. Retrieved from <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/intercultural-knowledge>
- Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J., & Scott, P. (2015). The European higher education area Between critical reflections and future policies. Springer Open. Doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0
- Dao, T. (2015). Northern Vietnamese students' perceptions of joint-training programs. VNU Journal of Sciences: Social Sciences and Humanities. Retrieved js.vnu.edu.vn/index.php/SSH/article/view/246
- de Wit, H. (2010). Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe and its assessment, trends and issues. NVAO, Nederlands – Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie. Retrieved: nvaio.com/page/downloads/internationalization_of_Higher_Education_in_Europe_DEF_december_2010.pdf
- Dooris, J., Ford, M., Klein, C., Lebron, J. & Shaw, K. (2015, December). Global Learning in the 21st Century: Curriculum and Assessment Recommendations. Report submitted to the Office of Institutional Assessment, George Mason University.
- George Mason University (2016a). Our Goal. Retrieved from <https://vision.gmu.edu/the-mason-vision/our-goal/>
- HSBC Bank (Vietnam). Ltd. (2016, June 8). The value of education Foundatons for the future. HSBC. Retrieved www.about.hsbc.com.vn/...vietnam.../20160608-gia-tri-cua-giao-duc-nhung-nen-tang-cua-tuong-lai.pdf
- Kreber, C. (2009 Summer). Internationalizing the Curriculum in Higher Education: New Directions for Teaching and Learning, Number 118 Retrieved from <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470537337.html>

- Knight, J. (2003). Updating the definition of internationalization. *International Higher Education*, 33, pps. 2-3. Retrieved: bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cihe/pdf.OHEpdfs/ihe33.pdf
- Latz, G. (2016, June 1). The Case for Internationalization. In D. Deardorff (Chair), *Exploring Hot Topics in International Education Through World Cafe*. Presented at the annual conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Denver.
- Leask, B. (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2), 205-221. doi: 10.1177/1028315308329786.
- Pham, M. H. (2014). Giao duc dai hoc co yeu to nuoc ngoai o Vietnam. Hien trang va de xuat phuong huong (tren co so xem xet xu huong quoc te hoa dai hoc the gioi). Hoi Thao Cai cach Giao duc Dai hoc (VED) 2014. Retrieved: hochtenao.vn/2014//09/10/giao-duc-dai-hoc-co-yeu-to-nuoc-ngoai-o-viet-nam-pham-hanh-minh
- Pham, H. (2016, February). Quoc te hoa giao duc Vietnam, nhung no luc tu tren xuong. *Giao duc Viet nam*. Retrieved: giaoduc.net.vn/giao-duc-24h/Quoc-te-hoa-giao-duc-dai-hoc-Viet-Nam-nhung-no-luc-tu-tren-xuong-post165489.gd
- RMIT University Vietnam. (2016). Teaching and learning at RMIT Vietnam. Retrieved on June 19, 2016 rmit.edu.vn/our-education
- Sinh Vu - VNU- Media. (2016, June). Tong ket chuong trinh dao tao tien tien giai doan 2006-2015: phat huy nang luc sang tao, ky nang lam viec va nghien cuu. Retrieved vnu-edu.vn/ttsk/?C1654/N19315/Tong-ket-chuong-trinh-dao-tao-tien-tien-giai-doan-2006
- Stearns, P. N. (2009). *Educating Global Citizens in Colleges and Universities: Challenges and Opportunities*. New York: Routledge.
- Stearns, P. (2015). *Pride and Regret: Reflections on Global Education from a Former Provost*. Trends & Insights. Presented at the annual conference of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Boston.
- U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Vietnam. (2016). *Grants and Scholarship Program*.
- Yamanaka, A. (2015). *Globalization of Higher Education Domestic Opportunity: Integrating International and Domestic Students*. Unpublished paper. Higher Education Program, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va.