A key step in the partnership process with cross-border coalitions involves addressing contradictory dynamics and creating a shared sense of understanding.

Framing Issues of International Education

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“It can be said, and has been said by many, that the internationalization of education is inevitable, as the advancement of knowledge and understanding is a global enterprise that has no borders” (de Wit, 2002, p. 95). The exponential expansion of new technologies, the inception of an increasingly mobile society, and the marketization of knowledge in Thomas Friedman’s (2007) flat, globalized world have fanned the already fiery demand for global higher education. According to Stewart and Kagan (2005), the global demand for higher education will increase from ninety-seven million in 2000 to 263 million by 2025, and seven million of those students will gain an education through online means, with students often taking these online courses from providers in other countries. Currently, more than one million students study at an institution outside their national borders, representing a tenfold increase over the last thirty years alone (Altbach, 1998; Husén, 1996). In an era of globalization that “brings multiple diverse economies, political systems, countries, and cultures across the world into one single free market economic structure,” institutions of higher education must seek opportunities to diversify and internationalize the student experience both within the curriculum and through global experiences as a means of maintaining or gaining a competitive edge in the global market (Tedrow and Mabokela, 2007, p. 164). Another push for international expansion of education occurs during financially stringent times. As government funding becomes less reliable, institutions of higher education must seek innovative avenues to generate revenue, often looking beyond borders to do so (Hodson and Thomas, 2001; Labi, 2009; Schugurensky, 2003; Zahn, Sandell, and Lindsay, 2007).
Various motivations drive international ventures, such as expanding access to higher education, generating profits, increasing visibility and competitiveness in the international higher education arena, and preparing and providing the next generation with skills and knowledge to navigate a global community and workforce (Chapman and Austin, 2002; Heffernan and Poole, 2005). Institutions may be driven by political, economic, sociocultural, and academic rationales to partner across borders (de Wit, 2002). Efforts to internationalize higher education can include international activity through national and institutional entities, partnerships, and joint initiatives; student, scholar, and staff mobility and exchange; open communication systems and outputs like Web sites, research information, and the media; knowledge-sharing through research and partnerships; and international programming and curriculum (Turner and Robson, 2008, pp. 12–14). Tedrow and Mabokela (2007) define these different forms of partnerships as “formally developed relations between institutions where the participating partners derive mutual benefit from the involvement” (p. 160). According to Magrath (as cited in de Wit, 2002), these international partnerships will shift in the coming years from cottage industries to multinational consortia as a consequence of globalization.

Key to understanding international educational partnerships is knowledge of how these partnerships are established. Who is involved? Who are the stakeholders? Who should be at the table for discussion and implementation? What are the various forms of partnerships? What are some of the challenges and successes? What are the consequences, implications, and outcomes? Lastly, how do we ensure sustainability, and why is sustainability important? Thinking about the answers to these questions in the planning phase can lead to effective and successful collaborative experiences.

**Stakeholders and Constituents in International Education Partnerships**

International education involves partnerships established by a myriad of stakeholders, including government-funded agencies and foundations, non-profit organizations, private sector entities, institutions, and universities. According to Altbach (1998), governmental policies and academic institutions “play a crucial role in determining the nature of foreign study opportunities and in shaping the realities of the experience” (p. 151). Thus, partnerships may begin with macro-level stakeholders at the governmental or institutional level forming policies that then funnel down to implementers like faculty and departmental programs. For instance, European institutions of higher education have taken a macro-level view of partnerships with the onset of the Bologna Process. Through coordinated efforts several well-established organizations have joined forces to support the cooperative process, including the European Association for International Education, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation in Higher Education, and CampusFrance (Labi, 2009).
In other cases, initiatives spring from the ground up and must be approved by top administration. In either situation, it is important to ensure that all stakeholders agree to the terms of the partnership; have an understanding of the expectations, goals, benefits, and partnership roles; and have built a partnership on trust, commitment, and communication (Heffernan and Poole, 2005). Without a strong foundation and clearly defined roles for each participant, the collaboration will not be sustainable and in some cases may never move beyond the concept phase to fruition. Moreover, not only do governmental entities and institutional leaders have a stake in international partnerships, but faculty, students, and administrators are key constituents affected by and interested in international educational partnerships (Taylor, 2003). Each of these stakeholder groups experience internationalization efforts uniquely.

**Faculty.** In an age of globalization, it is inevitable that faculty members will be forced to globalize their disciplinary perspectives: “some faculty will even become citizens of time rather than place [such that] invisible colleges in those disciplines now mostly confined to national boundaries will likely expand, resulting in the measurement of prestige and status by one’s colleagues worldwide” (Tierney, 1999, as cited in Morey, 2003, p. 82). Mason (1998) agrees, adding that “the areas of curriculum most appropriate for a global content (where perspectives from a global student body, or material reflecting global considerations, is relevant), will be the first showcase successes” in globalizing disciplines in higher education for international partnerships (p. 55).

Furthermore, faculty members are increasingly being scouted from abroad so that faculty values align with and sustain an institution’s international goals (Turner and Robson, 2008). In the case of Pittsburgh State, more than forty of the institution’s three-hundred faculty members were born in other countries, allowing the university to leverage its faculty members’ personal and professional ties abroad to build strong international partnerships (NAFSA, 2008). Given the changing nature of academe as a globalized entity, international education partners must look to the faculty as a distinct stakeholder, constituent, ally, and contributor to international efforts—and when faculty members do contribute to international education partnerships, these efforts must be rewarded, as in the case of Nebraska Wesleyan University, which provides faculty members 100 percent of their salary instead of two-thirds if they spend their sabbatical year outside the United States (NAFSA, 2008).

**Administrators.** The administrative leaders and international office personnel of an institution are frequently charged with the burdensome task of developing, implementing, and maintaining international education partnerships in various forms. These practitioners must have the intercultural sensitivity and interpersonal competence to effectively negotiate and maintain healthy partnerships, the etiquette to decline or terminate unhealthy partnerships, and the foresight to take precautions against
potential problems and mitigating circumstances. Effective administrators of international partnerships must be part diplomat, part attorney, part counselor, part soothsayer. Thus, it is essential that administrators serve an integral role in the early creation and negotiation phases of international partnerships, as these practitioners have the natural skill-set and requisite experience to carry out the development of the partnership successfully within a given timeframe.

**Students.** In international education partnerships “designed to prepare students for careers in the global economy and to facilitate greater intercultural understanding, tolerance and respect,” students unquestionably play a crucial role in the health, sustainability, and learning outcomes of the partnership (Turner and Robson, 2008, p. 58). Students are frequently the benefactors of international education partnerships at the institutional level. Furthermore, international students from the United States and abroad serve as cultural ambassadors in a reciprocal environs of educational exchange (Eggins, 2003). These students represent a new generation of highly mobile, globally competent individuals prepared to meet the economic, technological, and cultural challenges of a flat world.

**Types of International Education Partnerships**

International education partnerships, also referred to as cross-border or transnational collaborations, exist in various forms. These include, but are not limited to, faculty and student exchange programs, study abroad opportunities, joint research ventures, international degree offerings, and distance education (Eggins, 2003; Labi, 2009). De Wit (2002) states that these “strategic partnerships in research, teaching, and transfer of knowledge, between universities and of universities with business and beyond national borders, will be the future for higher education in order to manage the challenges that globalization will place on it” (p. 205).

**Study Abroad and Exchange.** Study abroad and faculty/student exchange programs are two of the most popular forms of international education partnerships. The U.S. Department of State’s Fulbright Program administered through the Institute of International Education is the largest U.S. international exchange program. Fulbright awarded approximately six thousand grants to students, teachers, professionals, and scholars in 2008, investing more than $275.4 million in this programming (“About Fulbright,” 2009). Governments abroad also invest in student exchange and study abroad. For example, in 2008, the Spanish Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, and Foreign Affairs invested approximately $3 million in the establishment of a foundation to help promote higher education abroad (Labi, 2009). This organization is just one of many established to help increase global exposure for higher education institutions.

In addition to government programs, institutions of higher education as well as for-profit and not-for-profit organizations maintain their own
study abroad and exchange programs, making study abroad a big business and a source of revenue generation at a time of economic upheaval in higher education. For-profit and not-for-profit organizations called third-party providers, like the American Institute for Foreign Study (AIFS) and the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), work with institutions abroad to bundle study abroad experiences for American students.

**Joint Research Ventures.** Institutions or individual faculty members may also choose to collaborate with partners from abroad on joint research ventures. Bringing an international perspective to research enhances its applicability in an increasingly globalized world and strengthens the framework of the research through diverse lenses. Shaw (2006) likens developing a joint research venture to the life-cycle stages of birth, childhood, adulthood, and death: one must “identify potential research colleagues, communicate with regard for cultural differences, identify a global problem to investigate, establish a working relationship, design a mutually beneficial project, set goals and divide the labor, present and disseminate the results, and terminate or maintain partnerships” (p. 441). Joint research ventures are effective at internationalizing an institution, its curriculum, and its contributing scholarship, and such ventures are personally and professionally meaningful for individual faculty members.

**International Degree Offerings.** An exciting form of international education partnerships is the international degree. Universities may partner with institutions abroad to develop a shared degree program or may offer its own degree program located at an international university. In 2006, the University of New Hampshire offered its first international degree in Management of Technology in Seoul, South Korea (“UNH Begins First International Degree Program,” 2006). The Whittemore School of Business and Economics manages the program, and Whittemore faculty members as well as faculty members from six of Seoul’s top business schools provide content instruction and work collaboratively on research. The College of William & Mary and St. Andrews University are currently developing a joint-degree program to be launched in the 2010–2011 academic year, whereby students will study at both institutions and receive a single degree bearing seals of the two universities (Crump, 2008).

**Distance Education.** International education partnerships are, in part, an outcome of enhanced technologies that have changed the face of higher education by moving coursework online, computerizing presentations, providing online communication through e-mail and discussion boards, and digitizing libraries and databases (Mason, 1998). The introduction of such technologies have made possible distance education programs and open universities that emphasize independent study of specially prepared learning materials in an online environment, ultimately bringing together students and teachers from around the world (Kaye and Rumble, 1996).

**Partnership Agreements.** Although many forms of international partnerships exist, de Wit (2002) explains that there is a standard procedure for formalizing an international partnership contract:
Traditionally, institutions of higher education establish their international linkages with a partner institution abroad via bilateral agreements, memorandum of understanding, and letters of intent. These agreements have the character of arrangements for educational cooperation (student and/or faculty exchanges, joint degree programs, and curriculum development), research cooperation, international development project, and so on. Sometimes these agreements are quite concrete; sometimes they are more an expression of intent. They are made at the department, center, or school, or institutional level. The recent rise of multilateral associations, consortia, and networks in higher education reflects the multilateral character of the process (p. 194).

Partnership Process: Supports and Challenges

Despite the common goals sought by international education partnerships, the processes involved in the development of the collaboration contains unique features and issues. The diversity of the stakeholders in the venture and the context of the educational system in the country contribute to how the partnership forms. The partners bring differing degrees of commitment to the relationship and bring varying levels of resources and expectations. A key step in the partnership process then involves addressing the sometimes contradictory dynamics and ultimately creating a shared sense of understanding. Central to the process is clearly defined expectations. These expectations should address an understanding of each partner’s contributions including funding, leadership and governance, and division of benefits produced by the collaboration.

Academic associations, academic consortia, and professional networks have increasingly operated as partners and providers of international education over the last decade (de Wit, 2002), yet “there are a great variety of such academic organizations, and it is not always clear what their objectives and goals are nor how successfully they operate” (p. 193). Therefore, as partners seek mutual understanding, they must take into account all levels of interactions involved in the partnership.

Organizational differences must also be taken into consideration. How might the contributions or intentions of the partnership differ for constituents of a two-year versus four-year institution, etc.? What support is available and who are the providers of support within the partnership? Who will champion the partnering process?

Supports for Partnerships. Heffernan and Poole (2005) created a list of practices essential to successful international partnerships, including communicating guidelines and timeframes; cross-cultural awareness training; building trust through competency, contracts, and face-to-face interactions as much as possible; and demonstrating internal and external commitment. This framework can help support the burgeoning development of an international partnership. Several important factors contribute to partnership success.
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(de Wit, 2002), not the least of which is building strong relationships that will last long term. How existing inventory and cultivated resources are employed also bolsters new partnerships. Having limited and achievable goals that build on the experiences of stakeholders’ interest produces a stronger foundation and moves beyond short-term thinking or quick fixes. A danger present is the pull to do too many things at once and not recognizing discrepancies in partner needs or attending to potential tensions. A champion of the partnership is a key linchpin to the process whose oversight of these practices contributes to the health of the partnership.

In the case of a partnership between the College of Education at Minnesota State University and Northern International University in Magadan, Russia, the creation of an International Programs Advisory Committee (IPAC) served the champion role (Zahn, Sandell, and Lindsay, 2007). This committee pulled together key players in the partnership process and was charged with overseeing funding and data collection of study abroad programs to help create buy-in among faculty and staff, expand their global presence, and increase partnerships with international institutions.

Governmental offices also serve as important advocates for international partnerships and aid in the partnership process. In 2007, the Spanish Ministry of Education streamlined its higher education admission process by accepting the Chinese university-entrance qualifications. This partnership coincided with efforts to recruit more international students from China, a country where business enterprise is expanding (Labi, 2009). The role of champion for a partnership occurs at many levels, but with the ultimate purpose of supporting the collaboration and obtaining shared outcomes.

When investigating what partnerships have worked for other institutions, it is important to ask the following questions: How did these partnerships overcome challenges? What are some of the lessons learned? What are some of the best practices? What will work for our culture? What will work for our partner's culture? Understanding the answers to these questions can help improve future partnership developments.

Challenges to Partnerships. With any partnership there are bound to be some challenges faced along the way, particularly among mandated partnerships or in situations of divided loyalties. What makes these partnerships fail? According to Tedrow and Mabokela (2007), for successful partnerships to develop, it is important to deal with conflicting group identities, incompatible views, power struggles, funding disagreements, unclear contractual agreements, differing academic calendars, confusing partnership roles, differing values in leadership, and cultural differences. Research identifies several types of challenges that serve to undermine partnerships including cultural differences, communication breakdown, lack of trust, and lack of commitment (Heffernan and Poole, 2005; Tedrow and Mabokela, 2007). Not all members may share the same organizational, institutional or national culture, beliefs or values. For example, a consortium of research universities, the U21 Global, recently announced damaging financial losses and
withdrawal of affiliate universities, due to lack of curricular quality assurance and faculty participation, diverging educational standards among the multiple participating nations, and the high cost of distance education (Kolowich, 2009).

Challenges can also evolve from political strategies and policies executed as partnerships form. Creating policies requires the use of power and authority, which often leads to conflict (Tye and Tye, 1992). The unequal basis of power in a partnership and the ways in which power is wielded can have detrimental impacts for all constituents, and threaten the sustainability of the relationship. Abusive use of power can manifest itself in different forms, such as coercion, authority, economic dominance, forceful persuasion, organizational structures and procedures that favor privileged partners, or through restrictive communication tactics (Fowler, 2009). Unequal distribution of dominance is a particular area of concern for partnerships involving developing countries, where power is already limited by lack of resources.

In addition to overcoming conflict, partnerships also face demands to assure measurable performance outcomes. Contributing to the difficult task of quality assurance are contested differences among partners around cultural, organizational, and institutional differences that make it difficult to assess quality due to divergent views and definitions of quality, performance indicators, and peer reviews (Hodson and Thomas, 2001). To address some of these issues, the Australian government established the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to oversee quality audits of all Australian institutions of higher education (Woodhouse, 2006). The agency has signed agreements with councils in partnering countries to help gather data to assure quality enforcement of programs (e.g., the Higher Education Quality Council–South Africa, New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council–India).

To circumvent some of the challenges inherent in international education partnerships, it is important to answer some critical questions. What are the available resources and who controls them? How will partner needs and objectives be met? Do all parties have the capabilities to support this partnering model? Is the partnership cost effective? Efforts for collaboration are likely to fail without the establishment of a strong foundation for the partnership.

**Conclusion**

Institutions of higher education must look beyond their borders to maintain viability in an increasingly competitive yet collaborative world, and perhaps the best answer is through international education partnership. Once institutions have identified key stakeholders, constituents, and attractive forms for partnership, it is essential that partners examine and undergird supportive efforts to combat potential challenges or mitigating circumstances that
may affect the sustainability of the partnership. In particular, institutional leaders must allocate time and resources to building and maintaining partnerships, establish institutional processes to nurture a culture of internationalization, and create measures of accountability to assess the health of partnerships. Finally, institutions should regard international partnerships as core to the internationalization process rather than as a gimmick to attract students or “rock star” international faculty. Only when collaborators are committed to long-term alliance, effective communication, and trust building do partners become invested in the process and outcomes shift from ideation to fulfillment.

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