International Education and Higher Education’s Revised Role in a Global Society

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Abstract The end goal of international education’s revised role in higher education is to provide a greater good to the global society. During the past several years, globalization has emerged as a trend that supports a move on the part of higher education to provide students with an education that extends beyond their native country (Brodin, 2010). Formidable global challenges contribute to necessary changes to the components of higher education so as to enhance overall societal good. Multi-cultural experiences that enhance career opportunities and components making up higher education’s revised role in international education include: international programs and curriculums, study abroad experiences, international tourism and sport, and international education’s potential economic impact on the university, local community, and world. Factors driving higher education’s revised role in international education include: technological progress in communication, international business and social needs, competitive job markets, and the global economy. In particular evidence continues to build in support of the notion that students who are immersed in foreign cultures will return home wiser and a more well rounded global citizen (Gumbel, 2011). International education in the form of experiences embedded into higher education curriculums is rapidly becoming the norm.

Keywords: higher education, international studies, multi-cultural, moral good


1. Introduction

International education’s revised role in higher education must help provide an overall good for the global society. Providing students of higher education with the wherewithal to make positive contributions is a positive step toward contributing to the overall good of society. Discussion of aspects currently supporting higher education’s modern day role in international education follows.

Globalization has emerged as a trend concept during the past several years, increasing the need to provide all members of society with information related to countries other than their own (Brodin, 2010). During the last decade of the 20th century, economic globalization discussions were common (Claggett & Stutzman, 2002). Leaders in higher education must continue to identify and address the economic needs of a global society through approaches to international education.

The new found interconnected nature of the world, over the past two decades, has established a calling to further expand higher education’s role to meet global needs. Numerous academic disciplines are well suited to establish a format to help students’ achieve global outcomes and components helpful in contributing to the good of a global society. Business, tourism, and sport are just a few disciplines conducive to globalization (Reimers, 2009). Science, artistic creation, trade, and international cooperation must be supported by an international base of knowledge. And, national security, economic competitiveness, and world leadership can be improved with a commitment to international education.

From an economic standpoint, institutions of higher education should seize the opportunity to integrate international education into their mission as it will have a positive economic impact on the university, local community, and world. Increases in international students enhance revenue streams for universities. From a broader perspective, international students bolster economies with their spending on tuition, housing, and discretionary items. Increased revenues from increases in international student enrollment provide universities with opportunities to further develop their international programs.

1.1. Global Challenges and International Education

The needs of the world are many, persistent, and dynamic. One of the most important current global challenges is the achievement of the tolerance to differences across cultures. Successful international careers call for the ability to accept and work within the
developing local educational programs. Programs in higher education are nearly as convenient as procedures to develop and maintain international. Given the ability to communicate electronically, the seated cultural divisions can be softened through multi-cultural experiences initiated by universities. Beyond social cultural tolerance, global citizens share in facing the global challenges of climate change, health epidemics, poverty, economic recessions, assaults on human rights, terrorism, political instability, and international conflicts (Reimers, 2009).

Each of these challenges can be improved through improved understandings of differences in cultures through international educational experiences. These challenges should not be dismissed as “international” but rather taken on by each and every locality in the interest of improving the globe. Universities should take the lead in developing international experiences for their students that will help improve these many global challenges.

1.2. Factors Driving Higher Education’s Revised Role in International Education

Higher education’s revised role in international education is driven by several factors. Such factors include technological progress in communication, international business and social needs, competitive job markets, and the global economy.

2. Communication Progress

The advent and growth of electronic networking has helped create rapid advances in international opportunities supported by advanced modes of communication. The influences of mass media, and telecommunications, including fax, e-mail, internet, and CNN TV, are breaking down barriers between peoples and their diverse cultures (Moran, Harris, & Moran, 2007). The internet, blogs, 24-hour worldwide television, and enhanced ease of international travel have facilitated personally transformative interactions between those in the developed world and those in developing countries (Zahra, Rawhouser, Bhawe, Neubaum, & Hayton, 2008). The convenience of communication resulting from technological advances must be utilized by higher education as it seeks to educate world citizens.

Advances in communication technologies are implicated in a wide variety of forms (Fulk & Desanctis, 1995). Even a most basic form of electronic technology, e-mail transmissions, allows for the near spontaneous communication, making for the simplification of logistical arrangements necessary for international education. Communicating electronically is paramount to being part of an advanced global network that brings about desired benefits such as increased competence, skill development, higher pay, and increases in job satisfaction Grant (n.d.). Given the ability to communicate electronically, the procedures to develop and maintain international programs in higher education are nearly as convenient as developing local educational programs.

Unfortunately, while many countries have developed the capacity to advance and sustain electronic communication, several have not (Grant, n.d.). Collective global efforts, therefore, led by universities, must strive to help less advanced countries achieve at least a minimal level of advanced communication abilities. It is the very same technology that some countries lack, that if harnessed effectively, can serve as part of a solution to educate those countries trailing in advanced technologies. Higher education, as an entity must initiate efforts to help trailing countries “catch up” in the area of electronic communication.

3. International Business and Social Needs

Business and social needs are constant in all countries regardless of a country’s state of affairs. Universal access to and the provision of information to individual can facilitate social opportunities (Zahra, et al., 2008). The communication revolution has made for expedient business transactions that are no longer hampered by restrictive geographical borders (Career opportunities, 2007). Research at institutions of higher education must be conducted to determine the most effective ways to utilize communication as a contemporary tool to initiate continued advancement of societies throughout the world in meeting their most urgent needs.

In addition to providing more opportunities to meet social needs, advances in communication have also provided new ways for social entrepreneurs to organize and manage their operations to deal with social needs worldwide, especially in developing countries (Zahra, et al., 2008). The fast paced nature and rewarding aspects of international business careers are attracting myriad people mainly because of the great opportunities and rewards available to those qualified. Cross culture communication is a necessity in global business and will be for many decades to come (Moran et al., 2007).

Higher education must be acutely aware of technological advances and utilize such advances to enhance an international focus. The ease of communication and commerce among countries makes international education outcomes more easily achievable. Programs teaching the requisite social skills necessary to successfully conduct international business must be offered by institutions of higher education. Higher education must be proactive in their efforts to not only develop students who learn technical and international business skills but also who experience various cultures for the purpose of refining cross-cultural social skills. Gaining cultural experiences will also support an understanding of the business structure in particular governments, and geographical locations.

4. Global Economy and Jobs

The current globally distressed economy has resulted in high unemployment rates across the world, making for a competitive job market for college graduates. Beginning in the U.S. in 2007, the recession spread across nations and still persists (It’s official: U.S. is in recession, 2008).
The seriousness of the recession is supported by an overall U.S. unemployment rate in 2010 of 9.5% and 27.6% in El Centro, California (Silverblatt, 2010).

Economic global recovery, albeit slow, appears to be on the horizon (Lambert, 2011). In particular, hiring is forecasted to increase in India, Taiwan, China, Turkey, Brazil and Singapore where strong growth in future hiring is anticipated (Manpower sees global growth, 2011).

Despite indications of recovery (Shierholz, 2010), the job market is still sluggish and jobs are not readily available to all, which is compounded by the high demand for jobs. College graduates will most likely continue to outnumber the supply of jobs in the foreseeable future. Prospective job candidates, therefore, must distinguish themselves as skillful experts in their field. Given the necessity of global education and experiences, graduates who do not obtain at least minimal levels of international education will be at a disadvantage when competing for jobs on the global scale.

Although knowledge of a foreign language, area studies, and international experience is needed, specific skill sets are still required to achieve jobs in industries that cross cultures (Career opportunities, 2007). Acquiring an understanding of and experiences related to cultures beyond one’s local region will further increase ones chances of gaining jobs in a struggling economy where jobs are scarce. Such experiences will be gained through study abroad components of preparation programs within institutions of higher education. Job market research should serve as the basis for developing international academic programs that will adequately prepare students for the global workforce.

It is of the utmost importance that universities place a premium on academic rigor during difficult financial times because only the best prepared graduates will secure jobs in the current market. Academic rigor at universities must be a point of emphasis, as it will further position universities to not only attract top students but also produce highly qualified graduates, which, in turn will enhance the image of the university.

4.1. International Education Components and Higher Education

Components making up higher education’s revised role in international education are a function of the necessity of enhancing career opportunities supported by multi-cultural experiences. Such components include international programs and curriculums, study abroad experiences, international tourism and sport, and the potential economic impact of international education on the university, local community, and world.

5. Cultural Experiences and Career Opportunities

The quality of graduates of higher education is enhanced by international programs that include on-site cultural experiences. International on-site experiences are no longer restricted to particular geographic regions. Rather, they extend the potential for careers and employment far beyond a local region. Experience in selected disciplines, through internships, and volunteer or part-time work is no longer viewed as a distinction but rather a necessity for acquisition of employment, regardless of the state of the economy. Real-world practicum experiences are essential in terms of providing students with an advantage over students whose studies are limited exclusively to classroom training. Experience is helpful, making the completion of an internship invaluable (Career opportunities, 2007). University graduates could face a distinct employment disadvantage against those graduates who obtain international educational experiences.

5.1. International Programs and Curriculums

Higher education program design and implementation of programs, courses, and international experiences is a major step in the internationalization of campuses of higher education. Some teachers and education entrepreneurs have developed a wide range of practices that foster global competency, such as improved foreign language curriculums, programs that promote intercultural competency, and internationally themed programs and curriculums (Reimers, 2009). Universities should consider implementing these internationalization strategies at their institutions.

Most international exchanges take place using English as a second language (Moran et al., 2007). Thus, it is important that students pursuing international studies, first and foremost, speak or learn to speak adequate English. Multilingualism is an asset that should be supported by a strong base of English (The benefits, 2009). A dependence on having sufficient numbers of citizens who are fluent in the languages is helpful for many endeavors (Edgar, Kelley, & Taylor, 2009).

5.2. Study Abroad Experiences

Real world experiences are integral components of international higher education. The worthy experiences of study abroad programs are many and must be provided for students.

Studying abroad has the ability to enhance the life of college students throughout and beyond their college careers as they become more effective leaders in the global community (Edgar et al., 2009). More specifically, study abroad can bring about an awareness of one’s own image, personal needs, values, and standards necessary to communicate and understand another’s culture (Moran et al., 2007). Those students who are immersed in foreign cultures will return home wiser and more mature (Gumbel, 2011). Improved academic performance, higher graduation rates, and improved knowledge of cultural practices were found by Redden (2010) to result from study abroad programs.

Being motivated to adapt and contemplate similarities and dissimilarities of one’s own culture while immersed in another culture is critical (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, Chiu, 2008). Study abroad was found to improve students’ abilities to place diverse behaviors in a cultural context (Redden, 2010). Instead of resisting differences in cultures, study abroad students generally become sensitive to different cultures.

True gains from study abroad experiences must come only with a predisposition of being open to new experiences. If one is open to new experiences, the
opportunity to acquire foreign ideas and retrieval of unconventional knowledge will come from study abroad experiences (Leung et al., 2008).

Although immersing oneself into a foreign culture is the best approach to gaining an authentic cultural experience, living abroad brings a degree of risk. An overseas experience carries an inherent risk; safety is never completely guaranteed (Gumbel, 2011). The political environment, racism, and capricious street crime are just a few examples of risks of which universities and students should be aware. Risk, however, can be mitigated. University study-abroad offices should use information systems that can acquire current crime statistics, political environments and other potential risk factors to help ensure student safety.

Reasonable risk similar to the risk in one’s native country should be assumed when living abroad. Universities should error on the side of caution when making decisions concerning the safety of students and students themselves should be aware of the risks and behave accordingly when living abroad. Common sense must prevail.

6. International Tourism and Sport

Tourism has proven to be a resilient sector (International tourism, 2011) and with the pending economic recovery will prove to be an economic stimulus. International tourism demand held up well in 2010, despite persistent economic uncertainty in some major markets, ranging from national disaster to political unrest (International tourism, 2011). Global tourism recovered strongly in 2010, spurred by emerging economies in Asia, the Middle East and the Americas (Goodman, 2011).

Higher education should place a premium on sport management programs, as tourism goes hand in hand with sport. Africa, for example, reported positive figures in 2009 and maintained economic growth, driven largely by tourism in 2010 by hosting events like the FIFA World Cup in South Africa (International tourism, 2011; Goodman, 2011). Sport managers will lead the organization and implementation of sporting events that attract audiences from various regions of the world, including but not limited to the Olympics and World Cup that take place across the globe and events such as the Super Bowl and Tour de France that are played in more permanent venues yet draw global audiences.

Projected increases in global travel and tourism will bring about economic opportunities for developed and emerging destinations around the world (Semone, 2008). University programs will be called on to provide students with skills necessary to develop tourism opportunities that meet the demands of the world population. Higher education will also be relied on to research and identify attractive tourism opportunities that can help stimulate economies.

7. Moving toward a Global Good

As higher education fulfills its role globally, actions must be grounded in morality. John Stuart Mill’s greatest happiness principle helps serve as a moral guide: “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Mill, 1863/1969, p. 36). Jeremy Bentham’s (1789/1961) utilitarian approach to morality through hedonic calculus also serves as a guide and calls for a collective analysis of all the anticipated pains and pleasures resulting from an action or combination of actions being considered prior to deciding which action does indeed bring about the greatest good. Thus, to a utilitarian end, institutions of higher education should determine the extent to which they play a role in addressing the global issues of society by predicting the overall pleasures gained and pains inflicted by actions on the part of higher education to support particular global initiatives. University leaders must always remain focused on the long term global goal of improving the lives of world citizens.

References


