

## Successful Internationalization in a Small Business School — A Canadian Experience

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**Abstract:** Following a survey of the literature on definition and scope of internationalization in post-secondary education, authors review activities to internationalize curriculum, extracurricular activities, the student body, faculty activities and comprehensive initiatives at a small regional business school in Canada. The school's commitment to a broad definition of internationalization has resulted in a multi-faceted and opportunistic approach to enhance the educational and learning experience for the students, professors and administration.

**Key words:** internationalization; business school

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### 1. Introduction

Incorporating an international dimension into teaching, learning, culture, life and work of educational institutions through a range of policies and programs is referred to as “internationalization” and has arisen in response to the integration of economic activity and the pervasive changes in our world referred to as “globalization” (Maringe, 2009; Hurd, 2007; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010). The task for institutions of higher learning is to educate global citizens with multicultural communication and the analytical skills appropriate for the complexities of our world (Editors, Academy of Management Learning and Education, 2010). This is especially so for business schools because these attributes are demanded for success in the changing world in which these graduates need to function and excel. Global competencies develop with cross cultural experiences (Hurd, 2007) so creation of opportunities to experience other cultures and environments is essential for this learning to occur (Zundel & Deane, 2011). Successful internationalization of an educational institution is achieved when there is an international dimension to the life, work and culture of the institution (Hurd, 2007). Explicit strategic direction to internationalize and the successful implementation of practices into teaching, student exchanges, staff exchanges, research collaborations and curriculum (Taylor, 2004, as cited in Ayoubi & Massoud, 2007) define the achievement of internationalization.

In his exploratory study of six universities in the United Kingdom, Maringe (2009) concludes that the processes used by educational institutions to integrate international perspectives into teaching and learning, research and service, are not well understood. In describing the process of internationalizing curriculum at

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Roosevelt University the authors presented a case study including a descriptive review of institutional-wide practices and practices within the business schools of five universities (Fuller, Gorener, Hasan, Haug, Holtsblatt, & Patzer, 2010).

The current article describes the changes adopted in a small business school in Canada in order to contribute to the greater understanding of the internationalization process. The following sections describe the initiatives undertaken in relation to the student body, the curriculum, faculty activities, extra-curricular activities, projects and the role of leaders.

## **2. Internationalizing the Student Body**

Joint imperatives to globalize at home and to contribute to financial viability (Labi, Lewington, Birchard, & Kremmer, 2010) are driving institutions to increasingly engage in international student recruitment. These drivers exist at the Okanagan School of Business. However, competition for internationally mobile students has increased in recent years. The School has embraced this challenge and has successfully recruited fee-paying international students for more than its fair market share. Like most schools, China is the largest single market segment. For this reason, a recruiting team consisting of an administrator, a faculty member and an international education staff member has been sent to China once a year for the past six years. To further improve the outcome of future recruitment activities under the increasingly competitive environment, a primary research project has been conducted in China to identify the determinants and motivations of Chinese students on their education destination decisions (He & Banham, in press). The analysis of research findings will help promote the School's strengths such as high graduate employability and relatively low tuition fees.

Many institutions are adapting their policies to more effectively recruit international students as evidenced by the fact that conditional admission is gaining popularity practice (Fischer, 2010). While this is a means to increasing the numbers of international students, it needs to be balanced with the quality of the educational experience for all students and the commitments made to educational outcomes as well as serving the needs of other stakeholders. Current practices of the Okanagan School of Business are in place to ensure that international students are registered throughout all available sections of the first-year courses, creating the opportunity for the different perspectives to be shared and understood by all students. This becomes more challenging in the upper levels of programs as students web-register for their courses.

International student recruitment only attracts students from countries where the push/pull relationship (Altbach, 1998, as cited in Li & Bray, 2007) is working to bring students to Canada. Therefore, international exchange partnerships exist to bring students from a wider range of cultures into the classroom and to have Canadian students experience studying overseas. The opportunities for exchange are also afforded to the School's international students as this again broadens their experience in a third country. The School's exchange program has institutional partners in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and the Americas. A careful balance is attempted between supply and demand to ensure opportunities are available to all interested students; the number of partners overall is manageable for maintaining active two-way relationships; and the destinations are selected to expand the historical, geographical and cultural perspectives of students.

## **3. Internationalizing the Curriculum**

Curricular changes are in evidence in cases and examples throughout textbooks and course materials as well

as in the development of specific new courses. Multicultural Management, International Business and International Trade have been included as electives in the Bachelor of Business Administration program for a number of years. With increasing engagement and awareness of internationalization, additional courses have been developed, including Institutions of International Trade and Comparative Practices in Management.

The development and adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards is a change affecting the accounting world. “There is currently global convergence towards a single set of high quality accounting standards for use throughout the world. Accordingly, the Accounting Standards Board of Canada has adopted a strategic plan to adopt International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs) by publicly accountable enterprises in Canada” and further, “Annual financial statements relating to fiscal years beginning on or after January 1, 2011, IFRSs will replace Canadian generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) currently applicable to publicly accountable enterprises” (Canada Revenue Agency, 2011). Canada joined with more than 100 countries changing to the new standards for public companies and the adoption required changes in the financial reporting and internal processes and practices of organizations (Myers, Norris, & Penney, 2011). This movement provided the incentive to develop Selected Topics in Accounting in IFRS at the Okanagan School of Business.

As a result of the changes to curriculum all students in the school are gaining a broader perspective of the application of their discipline.

#### **4. Internationalizing Faculty Activities**

A range of opportunities for international engagement are available for faculty, not just in their teaching responsibility but also in other aspects of their workloads including research, service and professional development. The opportunities include participation in the “Business Educators’ Study Tour” to visit educational partners, government institutions and industry locations in Europe.

In the summer of 2008, professors from Canada (Okanagan School of Business) and the United States of America (Northern State University) collaborated on a Comparative International Management course that involved site visits to enterprises on both sides of the border. The course examines business operations in a comparative context between the two countries, including the cultural, economic, financial, legal and political environments.

Professors from partner institutions are welcome visitors when seeking a host institution as part of their professional development and research agendas. Teaching at partner institutions is a growing interest particularly amongst some professors. This activity normally involves a condensed course delivery or guest lecturing and primarily occurs in the May/June period.

Increasing the opportunities to participate in international conferences for professors is possible as a result of the emphasis placed on the importance of internationalization of the curriculum as a driver to equip students for the increasingly globalizing business world. In addition to disseminating research findings at international conferences and in international academic journals, School’s members have also been invited to serve on international conference committees, an editorial board of an international journal, and a panel of a global professional organization. These are significant achievements for a small business school and further inspire its students, faculty and staff move forward in internationalization.

## **5. International Projects**

With an increased awareness of international issues and the larger world-view starting to permeate institutional culture, international projects begin to emerge and gain support. Some of the projects provide roles for professors and students; some of them are taken on as part of course project work; and some of them come about as a result of student volunteers. Examples include participation in a joint Canadian/European project for expanding international exchanges and educational opportunities; the student initiative to raise funds in support of victims of the tsunami and earthquake in Japan; and a course in “Entrepreneurship Development in Emerging Nations” that includes service learning in Ethiopia.

## **6. Extra-curricular Activities**

Throughout the last decade, the Okanagan School of Business students have been participating in various provincial, national and international business student competitions, including the Royal Roads Business Competition, the BC University and College Investment Challenge, the Inter-Collegiate Business Competition hosted by Queen’s University, Students for Free Enterprise (SIFE), and the International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition. In these competitions, faculty members have supported students as their mentors and coaches.

Opportunities for students to engage in international competitions are made possible as a result of taking a wider world-view. The Okanagan School of Business student teams have won numerous top titles in competitions and impressed their peers from large and prestigious business schools. These extra-curricular activities have greatly enhanced student learning experience and helped them prepare for their future business careers.

International students and interested staff, students, professors and instructors have engaged in a number of additional activities on campus. These include the Chinese New Year celebrations with cultural performances from around the world, a celebration brunch for international graduates and their parents attending convocation, visits to community organizations and businesses, field trips to tourist destinations, and a range of other spontaneous events.

## **7. Leadership**

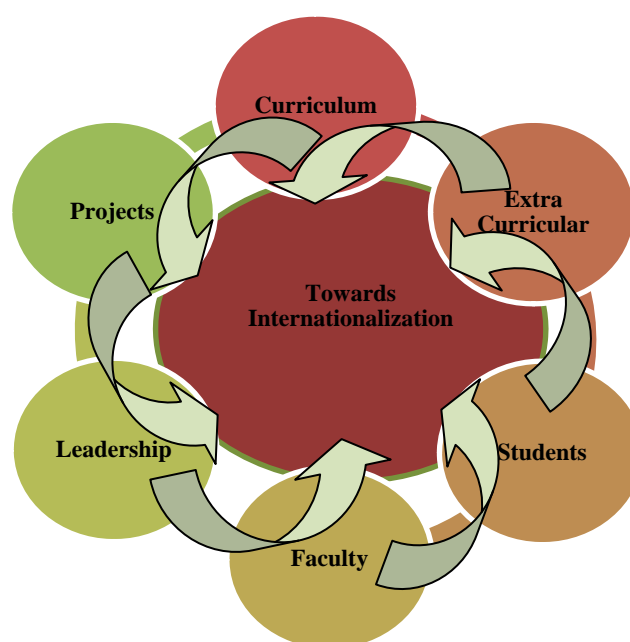
Congruent with the findings in the literature, when institutional leadership includes an international emphasis in the strategic planning and key directions of the institution, it clears the way for internationalization activities. At the college level, the president and vice presidents engage in relationship building and research forums as well as international events on campus. At the school level, the dean and associate dean not only initiate but also are directly involved in partnership building and developing, international student recruitment, international research collaborations, and international teaching.

Following this review of the categories of internationalization activities the next section presents a summary and depicts the processes in the proposed model.

## **8. Internationalization of a Small Business School**

In this school’s experience, the move towards internationalization has not been a linear process, but rather an opportunistic and circular movement. The process is depicted in the following model as an emergent and ongoing process. It probably would not be possible to set particular operational objectives as the external variables are so

influential in the ability to move forward. It is possible however to find champions, opportunities and areas of interest, and to encourage the development of activities congruent with the explicit strategic directions. It is also interesting to note that the movement towards internationalization was embraced by the School of Business before it came into focus for the institution. The ground swell was therefore supported once the organizational direction was made explicit. The model is designed to represent movement towards internationalization rather than an achievement of a new state of being. The challenges of internationalization and the initiatives implemented as a result of globalization will always mean that this is changing.



**Figure 1 Key Components of Internationalization in a Small Business School**

Each of the components impacts the institution and its educational outcomes. While the level of engagement and the number of activities in each component varies from year to year, efforts, activities and resources are addressed to each component to ensure its existence, functionality and continuance. Each activity also impacts the others: when students have qualified to participate in an international competition, it provides the opportunity for the faculty mentor to engage with other professors at the event; also when professors present at an international conference, it provides the opportunity to enrich teaching with the findings and results from their own and other researchers' work; and when professors develop a course incorporating international service learning, students' world view is expanded.

## 9. Conclusion

While the initial driver to recruit international students may be financial on the part of institutions, professors and administrators, particularly in business and management schools, are engaged in a larger agenda to implement a broader range of initiatives and activities to respond to globalization. While it is difficult to initiate and enhance every individual aspect of a holistic institutional approach, the adoption of strategic directions revolving around internationalization enables an opportunistic approach to be successful. Once internationalization initiatives are adopted into the curriculum, projects, professors' interests and extra-curricular activities, an institution is moving

towards organizational internationalization in the broader sense as identified in the literature review.

Opportunities for future research include the application and refinement of the model by examination of the process and components of internationalization in more institutions including those in other countries. Longitudinal studies would also be useful to measure activities and perceptions over time. The Okanagan School of Business ventured with varying degrees of success into the areas of international teaching, research, partnerships, student exchanges, and curriculum development. These activities are described in this article to make a small contribution to a greater understanding of the responses to globalization in educational institutions.

Internationalization of the academy, like all internationalization initiatives, will always remain subject to the risk of changing markets, changing policies, international events and currency fluctuations. The role of leadership in such an environment cannot be diminished.

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