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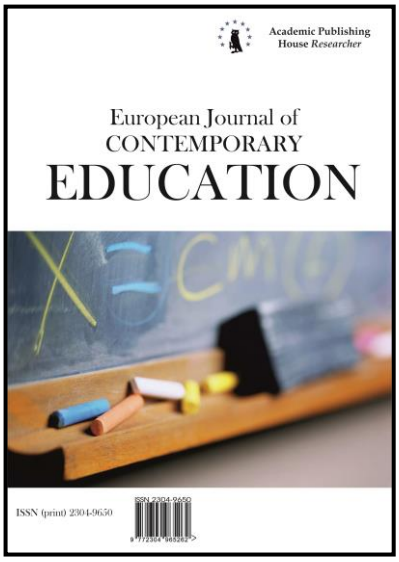

Faculty Support for Internationalization: The Case Study of a United States Based Private University

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Abstract

Universities around the world are internationalizing themselves at a higher pace than even seen before. Faculty support is recognized as critical for the success of the internationalization mission. However, faculty motivation and commitment are often taken for granted; administrators direct most of their attention to tackling partnership issues and managing the external environment. This paper unravels certain critical issues associated with faculty support for internationalization in a small private university located in a US jurisdiction area. Data show that absence of an institutional structure for effective organizational communication would result in imperfect information about internationalization being circulated. Also, incentives like sabbaticals and paid leaves will help improve faculty motivation and thereby garner their support.

Keywords: internationalization, higher education, challenges, faculty support, shared governance, culture.

1. Introduction

Since the early 2000's, we have been observing radical shifts in the global higher education landscape, primarily as a result of pressures from the knowledge-based economy and innovations in the information technology (Green, 2002; Marginson, Van der Wende, 2007; Nair, George, 2016). For survival, relevance, and success, higher education institutions around the world have begun to explore creative ways of engagement with the new world order (Brewer, 2010). Education as international business was something unavoidable for cash strapped universities (Marginson, 2002).

Even locally focused small-scale colleges have made it a point to introduce in their courses and degree offerings elements of the international context (Djan, George, 2016; Heffernan, Poole, 2005). Likewise, faculty members are encouraged to attend global events, network internationally, and make their presence felt by means of publications in international journals. Most US

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universities historically have had an international student services division, too. Also included were the export and import of textbooks and other learning materials (Bourke, 2000). Over the last fifteen years and more, educational export activities have diversified beyond traditional franchising and joint ventures.

Scholarly support for internationalization came in the form of the argument that it would significantly enhance institutional agility and competitive advantage for the participating universities (Lewin, 2010; Mazzarol, Soutar, 2001). In this wave, a large number of education institutions have grown entrepreneurial and have begun to operate physically beyond their national borders by building international inter-institutional partnerships (Zheng, Oakley, 2001). Such partnerships often offered students dual or joint degrees. In addition to creating opportunities for access, new knowledge creation, and curriculum enhancement, such partnerships often resulted in significant commercial advantage for the partnering institutions (Altbach, Knight, 2007). However, with the ultra-proliferation of partnerships over the last few years, the benefits from traditional modes of partnership have spread thin. There is a heightened awareness that partnerships have to grow in scope and complexity and that mere volume in terms of student numbers or short-term revenue are not enough.

In many cases, the top management of universities unilaterally decide whether to go international, to what extent, and also the modalities. Faculty and various other significant stakeholders are not consulted (Dewey, Duff, 2009). This creates friction within the university system and has the potential to derail progress in internationalization. Often times, the senior management of the US universities assume that faculty will fall in line and that systems and procedures will develop automatically to support international expansion. However, this is not the case (Amey, 2010; Bringle, Hatcher, Jones, 2012). If partnerships are to survive after the first wave of enthusiasm, they need to become institutionalized into the fabric of the department or institution, observes Amey (2010).

Shared governance is one of the characteristics for which the US higher education institutions have historically stood stellar (George, 2007). Making governance without sufficient faculty inputs and participatory exchanges will diminish institutional effectiveness (Birnbaum, 2004). However, critics would say that it will decrease efficiency in decision making; also, faculty members do not necessarily have a privileged and superior vantage point when it comes to deciding the strategic course of a university (Gerber, 2001). They are just one of the several stakeholders, according to the counterview (Jones, 2011). This paper examines the extent of faculty support for internationalizations efforts carried out by a small private university based in a US jurisdiction area and the resultant impacts upon partnership development.

2. Relevance

The University chosen for this study (*name anonymized*) is one of the oldest private educational institutions in a US jurisdiction area. This university is categorized as a liberal arts university. It has six departments: Humanities and Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Education, Communications, Business Administration and the Graduate School. The institution's main focus is to educate individuals holistically, through an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary educational experience, complemented with a major field, a double major, a major and a minor, or three minors in three different disciplines. The University offers Associate, Bachelor, Professional Post-Bachelor Certificate and Master's degree programs.

The enrollment of the university has been growing in the past years due to various factors such as an aggressive marketing campaign, new and unique academic offerings, and the political instability of its government controlled main competitor. Looking at the demographic figures that point to a drastic reduction in the number of young people in the age bracket of 18–24, and the diminishing enrollment in other private institutions, the administration of the university decided to enter the international market and attract foreign students to bring their experience to home.

In the academic year 2007–2008, after elaborating a self-study report required for the accreditation process by the Accrediting Board, the administration understood that the main academic projects were on track, and that it was a perfect time to start an assertive internationalization of the university. The intention of the project is to open the university to the international market, not only in terms of the enrollment, but also inserting the university in the academic international market. Among the first steps to internationalize the university were:

agreements with the China government to bring professors to teach Mandarin and the Chinese culture, a relationship was established with the *Council for the International Exchange of Scholars,* an organization that manages the Fulbright Scholars of which various scholars have visited the Case university, and a special program was established to recruit students from Central America and from the continental USA, specifically in areas where there is a high concentration of Hispanics students (Rivera, 2012).

In November 2012, the President of the University shared his view on the internationalization project with the university community. In the document, he establishes the next steps of the project. Some of the initiatives are: to continue to establish collaboration with US mainland universities and with community colleges, continue the relationship with the Fulbright program, and the hiring of a full-time professor as International Manager, among others (Rivera, 2012). The Internationalization document was sent via e-mail to the full-time professors, and has been accessible at the University's website.

At this time, there are five core academic projects being implemented. These projects are: language across the disciplines, ethics, service learning, research competencies, and entrepreneurship development. In addition, the university has established a new academic assessment plan based on the requirements of the accrediting agency. Due to the number of academic projects, the faculty is immersed in a high number of different initiatives that takes a lot of effort and energy. At the same time, the students are being asked to participate in these projects that involve new learning experiences and changing established paradigms. Since the internationalization project was created in the academic year 2007–2008, there has been no research performed in relation to how knowledgeable is the faculty about the project, how many has participated of any of the initiatives, how willing are those who have not been involved willing to engage in the project, and what measures must the administration should take for them to participate in the project.

3. Materials and methods

With the implementation of the project detailed above, various segments were being impacted: faculty, administration, and the students. It is important for all of these segments to understand the project scope in order to implement it in the right way. From a marketing perspective, this project has to be treated as an international product launch. Since it is a service that is being offered is important to establish how knowledgeable are the persons who are offering it (faculty) and how they can be more engaged in the project.

The research objectives that guided the study were the followings:

- Determine the level of knowledge of the faculty with respect to the internationalization project.
- Establish the motivational drivers for the professors who have been involved in the project.
- Determine which motivational drivers the university management must develop in order for more professors to engage in the program.
- Determine the faculty willingness to participate in the project and establish if the willingness to participate depends on previous international learning experiences.

The research questions were:

- Does the faculty know about the internationalization project? How much they know about the project?
- What percentage of the faculty has participated in any of the different initiatives of the project? What were the main attraction factors for them to participate?
- If they have not participated, how willing are they to participate? In which initiatives they would like to participate?
- If they have been involved in any of the initiatives, how do they rate their satisfaction with the project?

Since researchers wanted to establish if there is a relationship between faculty involvement in the project and their level of knowledge, motivational drivers, and previous international learning experience, quantitative method of analysis was found suitable. Creswell (2002) establishes "in quantitative research, the investigator studies problems in which trends need to be described or explanations need to be developed for relationships among variables" (p. 50). A cross-sectional

survey design was used for gathering data. The researchers collected data only at one point in time. Creswell (2002) explains that cross-sectional designs are used to collect data that exposes current opinions, attitudes or beliefs.

The data was collected in a survey administered among the full-time professors at the university. The sample was generated utilizing proportionate stratified sampling criteria: Each stratum represented an academic department and the sample size was proportionate to the population size in each stratum. This type of sampling is preferred by the researcher because it ensures that small minority groups are represented (Trochim, Donnelly, 2008). The researcher stratified the population based on the academic departments to which they belong and then a simple random sampling was done at each stratum. This allowed for all the different academic departments to be statistically represented in the sample. The sample size consisted of 43 full-time professors out of a population size of 130 full-time professors. The size is based on a 95 % confidence level with a +- 15 % confidence interval (Trochim, Donnelly, 2008).

The questionnaire was self-administered. Different types of questions were used in the questionnaire. It included dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions and interval-level response questions, specifically the Likert scale. The types of questions were selected with the objective of designing an easy-to-answer questionnaire due to the lack of time the full-time faculty has to participate in the study.

The data recollected was analyzed using descriptive techniques and correlational analysis. Summary statistics (frequencies, means, etc.) among with measures of dispersion (e.g. standard deviation) was used to understand generalized opinions. Cross tabulations with their Chi square values were used to understand respondent distribution across two interfacing variables. Inferential analysis was considered largely not needed because of the large size of the sample in comparison with the population of professors in the university. However, significance values are provided wherever appropriate in the analysis to ensure that the findings are applicable for the population.

4. Discussion

The overall sample response rate was 65 %. The sample was composed mainly of females (61 %), 51 years old or older (86 %). Fifty percent of the sample has been teaching at the university for 25 years or more and sixty-one percent (61 %) were full professors. Fig. 1 will show the sample distribution among the different academic departments.

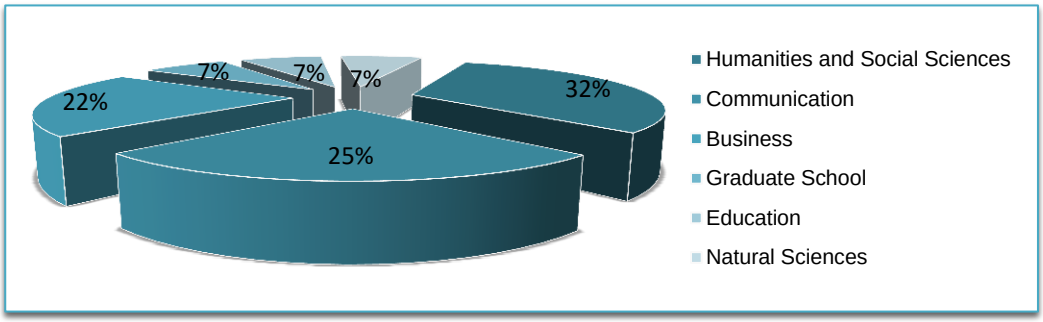

Fig. 1. Academic Departments to which sample belongs

The first question in the questionnaire measured the faculty's knowledge about the internationalization project. Sixty-one percent of the sample answered that they know about the project. The second question asked specifically about what they know about the internationalization project. An interesting finding was that only 57 % of the sample answered this issue. The remaining 43 % left the question in blank. It is interesting because based on the results of the first question, it was expected that at least the same percentage that established that they knew about the project answer this question. There were diverse answers from knowing about the initiative of attracting international students to knowledge about the different agreements with community colleges. Most of the answers were related to the initiatives where their academic department has been actively involved.

Table 1 shows the initiatives that they know about. The most known initiative was the agreement with the Chinese government. Among the different clauses in the agreement, one of them provided the university with a Chinese professor, whose main task was to teach Mandarin at the undergraduate level and give lectures about the Chinese culture. Due to the magnitude of the agreement, this initiative developed a lot of buzzwords. Following this initiative, the next one with the most knowledgeable faculty is the Faculty Resources Network. This network is very popular with the faculty because through this network they can participate in different seminars two times each year. The Summer Network is the most popular since it is based at New York University, and there are very diverse seminars topics. The least known initiative is the appointment of an International Manager. The reason behind this lack of knowledge may be the lack of an official announcement by the management to the university community.

Table 1. Initiatives that the faculty knows about

Initiative	Frequency	Percentage
Agreement with Chinese government	24	85.7 %
Faculty Resources Network	23	82.1 %
National Exchange Program	20	71.4 %
FulbrightProgram	20	71.4 %
Agreements Community Colleges	18	64.3 %
International Studies Program	15	53.6 %
Hispanic Nurse Solutions	14	50.0 %
Study Abroad Program	14	50.0 %
Appointment of International Manager	6	21.4 %

Note: Each initiative was analyzed as a separate variable. Respondents were asked to check all the initiatives they knew about.

As mentioned before, the university President wrote a document where he explains about the internationalization project. The reading of this document is necessary in order to understand the rationale of the project and all the initiatives that have been taking place at the university. The document is uploaded to the university website. One of the questions aimed at knowing how many professors have taken the time to read the document. Only 53 % of the sample has read the document. This lack of interest in reading the document has a direct effect on the knowledge about the project. For 47 % of the respondents, knowledge about the project comes from other sources, possibly grapevine (See Table 2). Crosstabs of these two variables establish that there is a significant association between these two variables.

Table 2. Cross tabulation of Knowledge about the project vs. reading the document

	Read the document	Have not read the document	
Knows about the project	9 (53 %)	8 (47 %)	17
No knowledge about the project	0 (0 %)	11 (100 %)	11
Grand Total	9	19	28

Note. The statistics were Chi square=8.58 df=1 Sig. 0.00

This lack of interest is reflected in the participation rate of faculty in activities related to the internationalization project. The majority of the sample has not attended any of the activities associated to internationalization. Table 3 shows the activities attended by the sample.

Table 3. Activities attended by the faculty

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Have not attended any activity	19	67.9%
Conference about Arab culture	7	25.0%
Faculty Resource Network	6	21.4%
Conference about Japanese culture	3	10.7%
Other	3	10.7%
Mandarin language course	1	3.6%

It is important to find out the reasons for attending those activities because they are the motivational drivers for the faculty to get involved. The following figure (See Fig. 2) shows the main reasons for attending those activities.

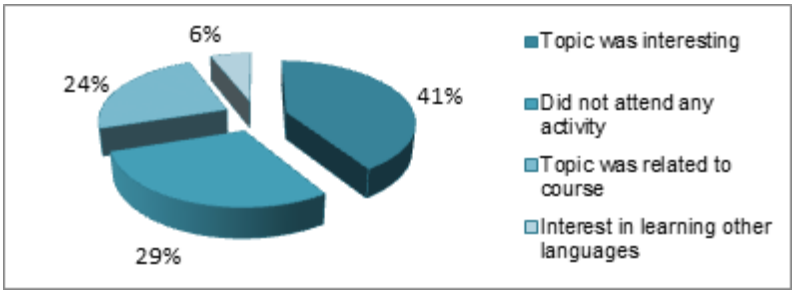

Fig. 2. Pie chart shows the reasons professors have for attending activities related to internationalization project.

For faculty to attend activities, they must perceive that the topics are interesting and related to their courses. Table 4 shows the activities in which they are interested in participating. Corroborating what was mentioned above the Faculty Resource Network is very popular among the faculty.

Table 4. Activities faculty will like to participate

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Faculty Resource Network	16	57.1 %
Being visiting professor	12	42.8 %
Students' Recruiting Tours	7	25.0 %
Fulbright Program	6	21.4 %
Other	3	10.7 %
Not interested	3	10.7 %

Table 5 shows the incentives that faculty would like to receive to be involved more actively in activities related to the internationalization project. The most attractive incentive is the sabbatical leave followed by a reduction in academic load. At the Case university, contrary to US mainland universities, the academic load is 15 credits. It is expected that the most attractive incentives would be related to lowering this load, which is perceived by some faculty to be excessive. A sabbatical leave implies free time from academic work; therefore, they could focus on the additional internationalization activities. The reduction in academic load will give them additional time to be involved in additional activities. The respondents that mentioned other specify that they will like time to do research, free time, continued education, continued education paid by the university.

Most of the incentives mentioned are related directly or indirectly to the faculty lack of time to be involved in additional activities because of their academic load.

Table 5. Incentives faculty will like to receive

Incentive	Frequency	Percentage
Sabbatical leave	15	53.6 %
Reduction of academic load	11	35.7 %
Additional monetary compensation	10	35.7 %
Other	5	17.9 %

Table 6 shows the mean value for statements related to faculty's attitude toward the internationalization project. The statements were presented using the Likert scale. The statement that obtained the highest mean was the one regarding the timing of the project. The sample agreed that now is the perfect timing for the internationalization project. The other two statements with the highest mean were related with them believing in the project and their willingness to participate with more incentives. These findings are significant because for the project to be successful is important for the faculty to believe in it and for them to be willing to participate. It is important for the management to realize that this increase in their involvement depend on the faculty obtaining more incentives. In general, this table depicts a favorable attitude toward the project.

Table 6. Mean Values for Statements related to faculty's attitude toward the internationalization project

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Sample
Now is the perfect timing for the internationalization project	4.0	1.7	0	5	28
I believe in the internationalization project	3.9	1.7	0	5	28
More willing to participate with more incentives	3.6	1.8	0	5	28
I have international experience teaching, studying or working.	2.9	2.2	0	5	28
Having international students in my courses makes them more interesting and challenging.	2.9	2.1	0	5	28
My experience with certain initiatives of the project has been rewarding.	2.6	2.1	0	5	28
My experience teaching international students has been enriching.	2.6	2.3	0	5	28

Note. This table shows the means value for the statements related to the faculty's attitude toward the internationalization project and toward their experience.

Correlational analysis was done between the variable of having international experience teaching, working or studying and the rest of the attitudes beliefs. Table 7 shows the results of the analysis. The only correlation was with the belief that the experience of with certain international initiatives has been rewarding.

Table 7. Correlational analysis between previous international experience and attitudes beliefs toward internationalization

International experience	Correlation	Sample Size	Significance	Strength
With…				
Timing	0.12	28	No	-
Believe in Project	0.27	28	No	-
Experience rewarding	0.57	28	Yes	Weak
Experience enriching	-0.17	28	No	-
Experience challenging	0.00	28	No	-
More incentive to participate	0.17	28	No	-

5. Discussion

In the global landscape that higher education system is operating, academic institutions have to look toward a well-formed internationalization strategy (Billing, 2004; George, 2017). The Case university, due to demographic changes in their local market and an increase in the competition for local students, started several years ago to go out and immerse itself in the global academic environment. It was more a reactive response to threats than a proactive leap to capture opportunities. In order for this internationalization project to be successful, it is critical that the personnel delivering the service, particularly the faculty, understands the project and get involved in it.

Based on the findings of this research, it can be established that most of the faculty knew about the project, even though they had not been actively involved in reading the partnership plan documents where the university's President set the rationale for the project and its long-term goals. Faculty members' knowledge about the internationalization project came through other communication vehicles such as informal communication. As a result of primary reliance upon grapevine, the faculty members did not have a developed understanding of the complete scope of the project. Also, the diversity of opinions reflected more of imperfect information inputs the faculty received rather than their innate biases about internationalization.

The initiative with the greatest awareness was the one with the most exposure in the mainstream media due to its nature (agreement with Chinese government). The second initiative with the highest awareness was the Faculty Resources Network. It had a high exposure to the internal communications network. The other initiatives that had high awareness were those related to programs known at the national level such as the Fulbright Program and the National Exchange Program.

The results show an apathetic faculty, where more than half of the sample has not attended any of the activities related to the internationalization project. This should be a major concern for the top administrators spearheading the internationalization mission. For faculty to participate, the activity should be about what they perceive as an interesting topic and should be related to their courses.

In the present study, faculty members expressed their interest in participating in the Faculty Resources Network and in being a visiting professor in other universities: thus, one way to attract faculty interest in internationalization is to actively seek such opportunities for the faculty members. These two activities involved traveling to other places and getting to know other cultures and the learning the faculty brings back would be valuable, too. To be more involved in the project, faculty members would also like to receive incentives such as sabbatical leaves or reduction in academic load, according to the study. These are generally held expectations, peer institutions offer such incentives, and absence of them will evidently demotivate the faculty.

Another interesting finding was that they were not very enthusiastic when they evaluated their experience in initiatives related to the project or regarding their experience teaching

international students. They expressed a neutral agreement with statements classifying those experiences as enriching, rewarding and challenging. This again was possibly because of the half-baked nature of information they received.

In summary, faculty generally trusted the leadership and generally committed their time and effort to support partnership initiatives. Trust did lead to some commitment. However, in the absence of quality assurance frameworks, institutionalized support structures, and more importantly effective communication, a lot of faculty excitement got dissipated without leading to results.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the knowledge and beliefs of the faculty about the internationalization project carried out by a small private university based in a US jurisdiction area. In general, faculty exhibited a positive attitude and optimism toward the internationalization project. Faculty members understood the perfect timing for the project would not wait for long and they believed in the promise of internationalization.

When the focus is on external opportunities, institutional risk from partnerships is not always properly evaluated (Shima, George, 2014). New competencies need to be developed institutionally in order to take advantage of external opportunities and faculty embracing the change is crucial here. It could be stated that information is the key driver for faculty support for partnerships: faculty members were knowledgeable about the project but in a very narrow sense. They did not have the complete scope of the project. This limited their beliefs about the value of participation in various internationalization activities. Well defined administrative structures will help communication flow in an organized manner. Leading internationalization with ad hoc committees may help with cost reduction in the short term, but is suicidal strategically.

Based on the survey responses, the researchers also infer that it is necessary to establish incentives for them to participate more actively. Lest, the involvement will be limited to a few intrinsically motivated faculty members. Incentives not necessarily must be monetary but could also be in terms of time for them to be able to attend the different activities.

Before concluding, certain limitations of the study should be indicated. First, there is potential for an innate bias – study respondents who feel negative about the administration's move are likely to be more vocal than those who are neutral or positive. Similar criticisms are often raised about using student ratings to gauge faculty performance (Spooren et al., 2013). However, the researchers of this study did not have a way to normalize this bias. Also, we noticed that many respondents did not have a clear idea of what the exact internationalization related policies were and consequently their responses to some other questions were not well informed. This means there could be validity issues in using such responses as facts and not as mere perceptions. A comparative study of the perceptions of administrators Vs faculty would have better revealed the gaps in perception. We aim to do this iteration sometime in the future. Finally, many of the findings are closely tied to the specific nuances in the Case university and using the findings as guidance for internationalization policy in other university should be attempted with caution. However, we do believe that these findings are valuable general pointers to the larger issue of shared governance in our academic institutions.

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