

## Introduction

# THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

SUSAN BUCK SUTTON, SENIOR ADVISOR FOR INTERNATIONALIZATION,  
BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

DANIEL OBST, DEPUTY VICE PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS,  
INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

This is a dynamic moment for international academic partnerships, a time of renewed vitality and broadened scope. For many colleges and universities, such partnerships are no longer simply one tactic of internationalization among many, but rather a core, driving philosophy. Institutions are rethinking their reasons for pursuing international partnerships and the processes by which they form them. The result is a fascinating, constantly changing landscape of new partnership forms, policies, and procedures.

The forces impelling this embrace of international partnerships can be grouped into two overarching themes: 1) growing recognition that academic internationalization is as much a process of outward engagement as internal restructuring, and 2) the increasing need for academic institutions to position themselves within emerging

global systems of higher education. The first theme reflects a view of student learning as advanced by bringing multiple voices into the classroom and curriculum; cutting-edge scholarship as advanced by collaboration among the best minds no matter where these are located; and community engagement as having global dimensions. The second theme revolves around what Jane Knight (2008) accurately describes as the now tumultuous global arena of higher education, with its jumble of confusing, often conflicting trends, including global rankings, new patterns of student mobility, the increasing reach of distance education, the emergence of regional networks and education hubs, financial restructuring, international patterns of brain drain and gain, and the dawning understanding that internationalization can have negative as well as positive consequences (see also Egron-Polak and Hudson 2010).

The first of these two themes argues unequivocally for greater and more creative use of international partnerships by institutions of higher learning. The second theme has evoked a range of responses, including some that pit institutions, nations, and organizations against each other for status and market share. Other responses to the second theme, however, take a more collaborative direction and give added impetus to international partnership formation.

The more collaborative response to the second theme posits that colleges and universities in different nations have much to gain from each other, not only in terms of their long-standing goals of internationalization but also in terms of institutional positioning on a global stage. International collaboration brings international recognition to those thus engaged and sets the stage for further international work and outreach. Within the emerging global systems of higher education, international academic partnerships are thus seen to convey what Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994), referring to international business, has labeled “collaborative advantage”; that is, the locally-knowledgeable partners, significant resources, transformative dialogues, and unexpected opportunities that accrue to institutions skilled at developing and sustaining effective international collaborations.

In short, international academic collaborations reflect a variety of motivations. They also take a variety of forms. This volume focuses on just one of these: partnerships among a pair or small set of institutions of higher learning. Networks, consortia, associations, and partnerships with other kinds of organizations, businesses, and local communities parallel and sometimes overlap such one-on-one partnerships among colleges and universities, but are beyond the scope of this discussion (see Stockley and de Wit 2010 for an introduction to these others). We focus instead on formal cooperative agreements between two (or sometimes several) colleges and universities located in different nations (see Kinser & Green 2009 for basic definitions of partnerships).

More specifically, this volume attempts to capture the current dynamism and range of what is happening with international partnership development among colleges and universities. International academic partnerships are a work in progress, a

conversation that needs many voices and points of entry. Different institutions are exploring the potential of international partnerships in different ways. They are also confronting the many challenges that make such work daunting. There is value in compiling and learning from their varied experiences, and the chapters that follow provide just such a panorama. This volume elaborates the U.S. experience, in its many forms, but entries from the UK, France, India, and Ethiopia clearly indicate that what is happening in the U.S. is not unique. The institutional types covered in the volume range from HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) to community colleges to research universities, and the academic fields are as diverse as engineering, business, education, health, and liberal arts. The resulting image is a complex, multi-faceted, and dynamic landscape of new ideas and bold moves.

### **What Partnerships Are Being Asked to Do**

A conclusion that quickly emerges from scanning this landscape is that international academic partnerships are being asked to do more than has been the case in the past. Twenty years ago partnerships were almost exclusively about student exchange, with only the occasional example of collaborative research or cooperative capacity-building or community development (Klasek 1992). While exchange partnerships continue strong, their goals have multiplied, their geographical span has widened, and—most importantly—they have been supplemented with other forms.

The partnerships documented in this volume pursue goals as varied as:

- Student learning, as global citizens and as future members of a global workforce;
- Curriculum building and course enhancement;
- Providing international learning experiences even for students who do not study abroad and even in disciplines that have historically had few such opportunities;
- Developing the international capacity of faculty and staff;
- Advancing research by connecting institutions and scholars with those who have similar strengths and interests;
- Connecting to key parts of the world;
- Supporting and enhancing the international ties and interests of the surrounding community;
- Tackling pressing global issues of health, education, economic development, environment, energy, conflict, inequality, human rights, and social justice;

- Promoting the overall mission of the institution, giving it distinctive qualities, and enhancing its international positioning and reputation;
- Generating revenue through tuition and grants;
- General institutional capacity building;
- Pursuit of public diplomacy and other national priorities; and
- Shaping the global system of higher education in beneficial ways.

These partnerships also employ a wide range of methods and strategies to achieve their goals. Some develop short-term, deeply-embedded study abroad programs that attract a wider range of students than those who study overseas for the whole year (e.g., Asgary & Thamhain). Some use international faculty, laboratories, and internships to introduce international learning to curricula in the professions and STEM fields (e.g., Haller & Groll, Valentine et al., Louime et al., Owusu-Ofori & Mayes). Dual degrees and joint educational programs have emerged that foster blended cohorts of students from different nations (e.g., Lavakare, Lacy & Wade, Foster & Jones, Harrell & Hinckley). Information technology and social media are used to create globally interactive classrooms (e.g., Haller & Groll, Chia et al., Valentine et al., Tedeschi et al., Harrell & Hinckley). International research teams compare perspectives and pool resources in exploring questions of mutual interest (Kuchinke, Lacy & Wade, Harrell & Hinckley), while similar teams collaborate on community development and institutional capacity building, such as spreading the community college system (Spangler & Tyler) and introducing innovative modes of English language instruction (Shull). (See Appendix A for a broad list of the many kinds of activities now undertaken by international partnerships.)

### **Transaction and Transformation**

Whatever their goals and forms, the partnerships discussed in this volume invoke the power of collaboration and an ethos of mutuality. There is something to be gained by working together that cannot be accomplished by either institution alone. The pursuit of mutual benefit, in which all partners gain from the engagement, is a near universal theme of these chapters. Some also articulate an additional benefit: they see mutuality as the mutual construction of goals and projects, the changes in thinking that result, and the benefits that occur as these collective efforts move forward with a momentum of their own (e.g., Cunningham et al., Carbonell).

This range of meaning for mutuality resonates with what can be seen as two poles of collaboration. Borrowing terminology from the field of service learning (Enos & Morton 2003), there appears to be a continuum of international academic partnerships from what might be called “transactional” to what might be called

“transformational” (Sutton 2010, Sutton, Egginton & Favela Forthcoming). Partnerships focused exclusively on student exchange are at the transactional end because students are traded in a manner that resembles transactions in a marketplace. The individuals who travel from one institution to another are changed as a result of the partnership, but the institutions themselves remain largely separate and unaffected. Transformational collaborations, in contrast, are those that change or transform entire departments, offices, and institutions, through the generation of common goals, projects, and products. Both sides emerge from the relationship somewhat altered. Transformational partnerships combine resources and view linkages as sources of institutional growth and collaborative learning. They often produce new initiatives that go far beyond what was originally planned.

Whether expressly articulated or not, it is clear that the partnerships discussed here demonstrate a movement toward the transformational side of this continuum. As already stated, more is expected of academic partnerships than in the past. There is increasing confidence that international collaboration—with carefully selected and strategic partners—can be an important element of institutional growth. What happens outside institutions can change what happens within them. Resources can be shared or created. Joint projects can take institutions to new places. The partnership itself becomes a kind of bi-national academic unit. And it is in this manner that transformative, strongly committed, strategic partnerships can be seen as important actors in the emerging global system of higher education.

### **Developing an Institutional Approach to Partnerships**

The desire to form more strategic international partnerships has led many colleges and universities to develop overall partnership plans and policies. These documents guide the establishment of new partnerships and reposition partnerships within institutional goals and missions. They move colleges and universities from “incidental” collaborations to “intentional” ones (Barnes) and produce “real” agreements rather than “feel good” ones (Aw & Dunsmore).

Several recent discussions (especially Van de Water, Green & Cook 2008, Kinser & Green 2009), as well as the contributions to this volume make clear that developing an institutional partnership program is a multipronged, long-term project encompassing at least the following elements:

- Taking stock of existing affiliations (creating a registry, assessing levels of activity, identifying gaps);
- Establishing a partnership approval process (developing application procedures and criteria for approval, identifying lines of decision-making);

- Articulating overall partnership goals and strategies (setting targets for number, types, and location of partnerships, activities they will pursue, impact they are expected to have, and the resources, opportunities, and challenges involved);
- Spreading a culture of partnership (promoting the value of partnerships, connecting to institutional and departmental mission, developing faculty capacity and supporting faculty in becoming involved);
- Developing policies, procedures, and organizational structures for managing partnerships (establishing steering committees, hiring staff, articulating principles for participating, tackling procedural roadblocks);
- Providing baseline financial and other support (equivalent to what is provided for other key institutional functions, such as personnel, IT, and travel funds);
- Developing effective practices for initiating partnerships (requiring multiple conversations, engagement of relevant decision-makers, and patience to let relationships and understandings mature);
- Drafting well-crafted Memoranda of Understanding and Implementation Plans (the first setting general parameters of the partnership and the second identifying specific activities, the financial and other responsibilities of each institution, outcomes expected, and when and how these will be assessed; see Appendix B);
- Pursuing effective practices for sustaining partnerships over time (providing the organization, support, and leadership to insure valued partnerships endure even when their original proposers are no longer active in them); and
- Establishing procedures for reviewing, revising, and/or terminating partnerships (including periodic assessment of activity levels and quality, number of students and faculty involved, effectiveness of the working relationship, cost, and impact).

Several of the chapters in this volume provide cogent discussions of how their institutions developed partnership plans, all closely connected to institutional mission and goals. Radwan's university, for example, found it useful to identify three tiers of partnership, each meriting a different approach. The University of Nottingham decided to focus on international teaching partnerships (Foster & Jones). Step one for Ethiopian institutions may well be identifying what they have to offer partners, since they are more used to seeing themselves as less developed than their international counterparts (Francisconi). Harrell & Hinckley give a particularly illuminating account of modifying their institution's original plan as a result of on-the-ground experiences.

## **Challenges to Be Met**

No matter how good the plan may be, international partnership work is not without its challenges, and many of these chapters take up this point as well. Many of these difficulties derive from the relative newness of such collaborations, at least in the robust multifaceted form presented in this volume. Administrators, fiscal officers, and faculty need to be convinced of the value of this new form, avenues of support must be identified, and procedural and structural roadblocks that limit what can be done overseas must be addressed (Lavakare, Kuchinke, Asgary & Thamhain, Osuwu-Ofori & Mayes). International work has to earn its place alongside other priorities with regard to institutional mission (Valentine et al.). Policies that come from older, more inward-looking administrative forms need to be rethought (Delisle).

Other challenges reflect the turbulent changes occurring in higher education in general: from funding difficulties to online delivery of degrees, branch campuses, the possible rise of a small set of dominant global universities, significant differences in educational resources across nations, and political unrest both within and among nations (Altbach & Knight 2010, Knight 2008, Wildavsky 2010). These can create a tension between institutional advancement and collaborative advancement in international partnerships (Haller & Groll). Issues of brain-drain and gain, of educational and economic inequalities between the Global North and Global South can also strain partnership goals of reciprocity (Francisconi).

Other chapters in this volume discuss the challenges involved in engaging U.S. students, many of whom lack fluency beyond English, find the cost of studying abroad too high, and may be majoring in disciplines not historically engaged in international work (Asgary & Thamhain, Valentine et al., Baker). International partnerships that involve student exchange are often unbalanced, with fewer U.S. students going out than their counterparts coming in (Klahr, Asgary & Thamhain).

Finally, these chapters discuss the challenges of meshing institutional policies, procedures, and accepted business practices across nations, as well as different educational cultures and accreditation systems (Baker, Shull, Harrell & Hinckley). In a similar vein, many a partnership has foundered on false assumptions that both sides understood the meaning of partnership in the same way, and overly ambitious but unrealistic proposals (Harrell & Hinckley).

## **Developing and Sustaining a Partnership**

What these chapters provide are stories of partnerships that have overcome these and other challenges. In so doing, they identify factors that have proven effective both for selecting partners at the outset and sustaining collaboration in the long run. Klahr,

Barnes, Louime et al., Delisle, and Aw & Dunsmore devote particular attention to partnership selection, assessing what makes a good institutional match, what must be learned about potential partners in order to evaluate the match, the kinds of candid conversation and careful listening that must occur, and the need to make sure that institutions have the same understanding of what partnerships mean in general and what the specific one being proposed might achieve. Cunningham and her colleagues see this as a dialogical process in which positions and understandings are modified as conversation proceeds. Relevant decision-makers must be involved, and faculty champions identified and supported (Lacy & Wade, Kuchinke). Patience, flexibility, and attention to building relationships, trust, and rapport are critical (Shepherd, Baker). So is identifying early achievable projects that can move the partnership forward (Tedeschi et al., Lavakare).

These chapters also identify factors that distinguish long-lived and productive collaborations from those that fade more quickly. (See Duval 2009, Hartle 2008, Kellogg 2009, Chan 2004, Prichard 1996, Kinser & Green 2009, Wiley 2006, de Wit 2004, Van Ginkel 1996, Van de Water, Green & Koch 2008, Sutton, Egginton & Favela Forthcoming for general discussions of what builds strong partnerships.) In all such cases, mutual benefit must be achieved, and there must be a balance of success in partnership projects (even if some fail). Operating with integrity, trust, and genuine reciprocity is essential, as is developing a system that fosters frequent, candid, open-ended communication that attends to cultural, linguistic, and institutional differences (Baker, Shepherd). Difficulties and crises must be handled openly and with a sense that the institutions are committed to each other for the long-run (Delisle, Baker, Lacy & Wade). Adaptability, flexibility, and willingness to change course keep collaboration active and real (Owusu-Ofori & Mayes, Harrell & Hinckley). All relevant constituencies should be engaged on both sides and structures put into place to manage the partnership and make key decisions (Carbonell, Radwan, Asgary & Thamhain, Foster & Jones, Barnes).

Long-lived partnerships also develop an ethos that the partnership is as important as any particular sub-project or individual (Shull) and develop activities that build relationships across participants while also bringing in newcomers (Cunningham et al., Harrell & Hinckley, Tedeschi et al., Brustein & Miller). They become integrated with institutional mission and core curricula (Louime et al., Klahr, Valentine et al., Owusu-Ofori & Mayes) and are also advanced when they broaden their reach to connect to local communities and businesses (Louime et al., Asgary & Thamhain, Brustein & Miller, Harrell & Hinckley). And they require regular assessment and reworking (Louime et al., Baker, Carbonell, Radwan, Tedeschi et al., Harrell & Hinckley).

Finally, long-lived partnerships are given base-line support by their institutions to keep them moving forward, but simultaneously generate new resources and external funding. Seed monies for faculty engagement, staffing to manage the partnership,

programs to orient newcomers and provide the needed cultural background are all very useful (Klahr, Barnes, Kuchinke, Radwan, Foster & Jones, Haller & Groll, Lacy & Wade). The Ohio State University has even moved to opening international offices in key countries to manage their partnerships on the ground (Brustein & Miller). At the same time, successful partnerships bring new resources both to their constituent institutions and to the partnership as a whole through external grants, resource-sharing, and tuition generation (Shepherd, Haller & Groll, Harrell & Hinckley).

### **The Era of International Educational Partnerships**

The challenges faced in constructing and sustaining international academic partnerships could, of course, ultimately prove stronger than the forces favoring such collaborations. At the present moment, however, such affiliations are experiencing a tremendous growth and elaboration, what might even be called a flowering. The forms are many and the goals ambitious. A sense that institutions can do more together than they can do alone is taking hold, coupled with the realization that learning, research, institution-building, and community engagement are now global endeavors. International partnerships are playing an important role in the global systems of higher education that are now emerging, operating as bi- or multi-national nodes within these systems.

It is for such reasons that several governments and organizations have recently developed programs that support the establishment of international academic partnerships. For example in the United States, the U.S. Department of Education has for many years provided funding for innovative academic linkages or small consortia through programs such as the U.S.-Brazil Higher Education Consortia Program, the European Union-United States Atlantis Program, the Program for North American Mobility in Higher Education, and the U.S.-Russia Program, although these programs have tentatively been suspended because of the financial crisis. In 2010, the U.S. Embassy in Iraq launched a multimillion-dollar University Linkages Program that will fund partnerships between five Iraqi universities and five U.S. universities, with a focus on curriculum review and reform, career center development, and student and faculty exchanges. In June 2011, India's Minister of External Affairs, Shri S.M. Krishna, and the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, announced the launch of the Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative, which aims to strengthen academic collaboration between U.S. and Indian higher education institutions by providing U.S.-India Institutional Partnership Grants. And the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs provided grant funding to the Institute of International Education to launch the U.S.-Indonesia Partnership Program for Study Abroad Capacity, an initiative that brings together six U.S.

and six Indonesian institutions. Francisconi's chapter describes a U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia–sponsored workshop and seed grant competition to promote academic partnerships between U.S. and Ethiopian institutions.

Other governments and private foundations and organizations have also recently launched initiatives to support international linkages. The chapters by Delisle and Shepherd recount such efforts in France and the UK, respectively. Appendix C describes IIE's Center for International Partnerships in Higher Education, which assists institutions in developing or expanding international partnerships through initiatives such as the International Academic Partnership Program. These initiatives may well be harbingers of more to come.

As demonstrated by the chapters in this volume, we have entered an era of international collaboration among colleges and universities. The partnerships thus formed enhance, even transform, the institutions that engage in them, produce enduring insights and relationships across national boundaries, and are creating a globally collaborative conversation on the forms and future of higher education that is likely to continue well into the future.

---

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2010). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11, 290-305.
- Altbach, P. G., & Teichler, U. (2001). Internationalization and exchanges in a globalized university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 5, 5-25.
- Bhandari, R. (2010). *International India: A turning point in educational exchange with the U.S.* New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Chan, W. Y. (2004). International cooperation in higher education: Theory and practice. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 8, 32-55.
- De Wit, H. (2004). Academic alliances and networks: A new internationalization strategy in response to the globalization of our societies. In Theather, D. (Ed.) *Consortia, international networking, alliances of universities*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Duval, J. (2009). *Crafting strategic partnerships*. Presentation at Annual Conference, International Commission, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, Colorado Springs.
- Egron-Polak, E., & Hudson, R. (2010). *Internationalization of higher education: Global trends, regional perspectives*. Paris: International Association of Universities.
- Enos, S., & Morton K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby (Ed.) *Building partnerships for service learning* (pp. 20-41). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Hartle, T. (2008). Expanding partnerships to strengthen Africa's higher education institutions. Washington, DC: U.S. AID and Higher Education for Development.
- Institute of International Education (2011). Building sustainable U.S.-Ethiopian university partnerships: Findings from a higher education conference. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Kanter, R. M. (1994). Collaborative advantage: The art of alliances. *Harvard Business Review*. July-August.
- Kemp, N., & Humfrey, C. (2010). UK-US higher education partnerships: Realising the potential. London: The British Council. Retrieved from [http://www.britishcouncil.org/uk-us\\_higher\\_education\\_partnerships\\_realising\\_the\\_potential.pdf](http://www.britishcouncil.org/uk-us_higher_education_partnerships_realising_the_potential.pdf)
- Kellogg, E. D. (2009). Partnerships for development. Presentation at NAFSA Annual Conference, Minneapolis.
- Klasek, C. B. (1992). Inter-institutional cooperation guidelines and agreements. In C. B. Klasek (Ed.), *Bridges to the future: Strategies for internationalizing higher education* (pp. 108-128). Carbondale, IL: Association of International Education Administrators.
- Kinser, K., & Green, M. F. (2009). The power of partnerships: A transatlantic dialogue. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Knight, J. (2008). Higher education in turmoil: The changing world of internationalization. Rotterdam: Sense Pubs.
- Laughlin, S. (2008). U.S.-China educational exchange: Perspectives on a growing partnership. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Linkages: Engaging in Global Partnerships (Spring 2007). *IIE Networker Magazine*.
- Obst, D., & Kuder, M. (2009). Joint and double degree programs: An emerging model for transatlantic exchange. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Stockley, D. & de Wit, H. (2010). Global trends in higher education and the significance of international networks. In Advancing Australia-Europe Cooperation in International Education. Proceedings of a joint IEAA-EAIE Symposium. IEAA-EAIE, "Advancing Europe-Australia cooperation in higher education," Sydney, 11-12 October 2009.
- Sutton, S. B. (2010). Transforming internationalization through partnerships. *International Educator*, 19(1), 60-63.
- Sutton, S. B., Egginton, E., & Favela, R. (Forthcoming). Collaborating on the future: Strategic partnerships and linkages. In D. Deardorff, J.D. Heyl, T. Adams, & H. de Wit (Eds.), *Bridges to the Future: New strategies for internationalizing higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Thullen, M., Tillman, M. J., Horner, D. D., Carty, S., and Kennedy, S. (1997). Cooperating with a university in the United States: NAFSA's guide to interuniversity linkages. Washington, DC: NAFSA.
- Van de Water, J., Green, M. F., & Koch, K. (2008). International partnerships: Guidelines for colleges and universities. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.
- Van Ginkel, H. (1996). Networking and strategic alliances: Dynamic patterns of organization and co-operation. CRE-Action 109. Geneva: CRE.
- Wildavsky, B. (2010). The great brain race: How global universities are reshaping the world. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Wiley, D. (2006). Best practices for international partnerships with higher education institutions in Africa. Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, African Studies Center.