Partnering & Consortium in Higher Education:
Accepting Cultural Diversity for Sustainability

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February 21, 2012 Washington D.C.
"Partnering & Consortium in Higher Education: Accepting Cultural Diversity for Sustainability"

The value of university partnerships (whether they are developed by the university as a whole, or contained within various colleges, schools, departments or programs) with local, regional, national and international communities are well understood by leaders in higher education. Partnerships or alliances or consortium can take on many forms including those with other institutions of education, within a framework of a consortium of universities, with a university and its alumni.

Key words: Consortium, Cultural diversity, Sustainability, Higher Education, Virtual Lecturers, Internationalization, Multi-cultural competence,

The world of higher education is changing, and the world in which higher education plays a significant role is changing. There are many reasons for transformation. Key drivers of change are the development of advanced communication and technological services, increased international labor mobility, more emphasis on the market economy and the trade liberalization, focus on the knowledge society, increased levels of private investment and decreased public support for education, and lifelong learning. The international dimension of postsecondary education is therefore becoming increasingly important and, at the same time, more and more complex (Knight, 2004).
Despite common origin and academic structure, the history of higher education is not similar in all the countries in this world. The system of education, its practices, applications and perceptions are also found different from nation to nation. In this era of globalization and internationalization, the higher education has become the basic need of all the nations to face competition, resource problems, technological advancement, economical development and infrastructural development of the nation.

In one sentence we can say that the transformation of the nation from underdeveloped to developed and to make it economically, socially and culturally strong, higher education is one and only tool to success in this globalized borderless social information world.
The history of higher education of Europe & America in comparison to Asia and Africa is older and more developed too. Whereas, the religious education system and history may be better as well as old in Asia & Africa than Europe & America. The methods of teaching and learning were also different in Europe & America to Asia & Africa. These facts are still common in the present world of communication & information technology. Most of the Asian countries though they are doing well to move ahead of Europe & America in Technology, they have not totally changed in their teaching learning style and environment as well as not following the way of delivering the knowledge and idea like in Europe & America. This methodological and cultural gap of lecturing and learning should be changed very soon by the Asian nations to go along with the global competence by accepting use of technology in higher education.
On the other hand, western nations should also accept the cultural diversity in their classes with the real understanding of the need, will and tradition of the international students who come from different culture, community and background in search of high quality higher education.

We, as the leaders of higher education must find the actual gap of education systems and methods in and between these nations. A globally acceptable common course structure and accreditation system should be developed by the leaders and administrators of higher education to overcome to the students' mobility, faculties' mobility and materialize the cultural diversity in Universities and Colleges in all the streams and disciplines for sustainability.
The question whether universities have always been international in nature or not, has been addressed by several scholars in higher education policy studies (Van der Wende, 2002, as cited by Beerkens, 2004).

Partnerships in academy are becoming more common, for a variety of reasons. Policymakers view partnership as a strategic way of meeting the state’s education and economic goals. Institutions benefit from facilities and resource sharing (McCord, 2002; Sink, Jackson, Boham, and Shockley, 2004), and students gain access to additional instruction and a smoother transition to postsecondary education (Bragg, 2000).
Consortia are a type of partnership that, though not always informal, are often perceived as voluntary and under member control. Baus and Ramsbottom (1999) describe the rise of educational consortia in the 1960s and 1970s to address common issues, primarily concerned with students' needs. Often begun as voluntary collaboration, a consortium is multi-institutional, multifunctional and has long-term member support.

Initial incentives to form a consortium typically revolve around academic issues such as cross-registration, faculty exchange, or use of other academic resources. Leadership at the highest level is typically required to make this form of partnership operate, especially if institutional policies and resources are centrally controlled. Clear role definition and communication of expectations are also required.
Academic consortia are described as a group of academic units who are united for the single purpose of fulfilling a contract. They are characterized by a limited life span, and are faculty or leadership driven.

According to De Wit “suchlike consortia will continue to be the most common form of international organization in higher education, and increasingly as part of academic associations or institutional networks”.

Building a Secure World Through International Education
Partnerships or alliances or consortium can take on many forms including those with other institutions of education, within a framework of a consortium of universities, with a university and its alumni (both local and international), and with a university and various for-profit, not-for-profit, governmental, non-governmental, and other types of organizations.

The list of possibilities is truly only limited by a university’s vision and corresponding goals. The goals of university-community alliances can vary widely, including enhancing the content and array of educational offerings, recruiting new students and faculties, and raising funds or developing streams of revenues to support mutual aspirations such as building a shared global reputation as a progressive and engaged community.
Clearly stated policies and resulting priorities led to a myriad of noteworthy international initiatives among the universities examined. These initiatives include exceptional visiting scholar support, unique degree and non-degree certification options, distinctive overseas study agendas, exclusive international internships, innovative student scholarships, part-time job options in the international arena; outstanding cross-disciplinary grant opportunities for faculty, and promising overseas partnerships, all of which meshed with their respective institutional vision and strengths.

Institutions with outstanding international programs were those that cultivated an underlying philosophy of providing an international environment and international experience for all their students. Partnerships and alliances are critical components of international educational development and a global focus.
The significance of the intercultural dimensions of internationalization in higher education has been continuously stressed in the Anglo-European literature since the mid-1990s (e.g., De Vita, 2007; De Wit, 1995; Otten, 2003; van der Wende, 2001).

Despite the growing number of international education programs, students’ response to various pedagogical tools used in these programs has rarely been examined. Accordingly, business academics teaching on such programs may not be sure as to which pedagogical tools to use (Mahrous & Ahmed).
According to Knight and de Wit (1995), a major aspect of the internationalization of higher education is to prepare staff, faculty, and students to function in intercultural contexts. They argue that one of the major functions of international education is to enable students “to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations (environmental, economic, cultural and social) and therefore prepare [those involved] to function in an international and intercultural context” (p.13) (as cited by Whitsed and Volet: 2010).

The internationalization discourse is, however, gradually evolving, with universities expected to transform themselves into learning environments where reciprocal intercultural understanding is actively promoted and the development of intercultural communication skills intentionally embedded in the curriculum (Brown & Jones, 2007; Turner & Robson, 2008).
In an Empirical Study of Asian Students’ Learning Experiences at a New Zealand University, conducted by Campbell & Li concluded that Asian students were overall satisfied with their learning experiences at the university in terms of educational quality, program offering, and learning support whereas Asian students’ voices and narratives on which the research was based have challenged some of the taken-for-granted education traditions, norms, and practices.

Campbell & Li observed that language difficulties and cultural differences as intercultural communication barriers, unfamiliar patterns of classroom interactions, lack of knowledge of academic norms and conventions, inadequate learning support, difficulties in making friends with domestic students, and lack of sense of belongingness, all these combining to affect Asian students’ perceptions and levels of satisfaction with their learning experiences at the university. Campbell & Li further mentioned that lecturers and host institutions are professionally responsible to equip Asian students with adequate knowledge of academic discourses and to help them transcend the culturally framed borders and subjectivities. To meet these challenges, Universities need to review and adapt the pedagogical practices and to re-align them to the needs of both local and international students.
Asia, regardless its territorial direction is going to lead the tomorrow's world very soon not only in natural resources, technology, tourism, economy but also in education. These facts of huge population, enriched natural resources and changing political system and philosophy with transformation of conservative rigid socio-cultural dimension to "Facebook Generation" are the new assets of modern Asia. Asia is being global with internationalization in higher education along with business and industries by accepting the world's culture and changes in it.

The more successful institutions tended to view themselves as an education service provider with the larger community being their customer, and the student being their “raw material” that are being shaped, molded and guided in order to eventually achieve excellence in the global arena.
4. Current Scope of Higher Education in the Globalized Market:
Use of Technology for Academic Partnerships and Multi-cultural understanding

The Partner University or College should support to each other to negotiate with one or more of universities to enhance their program of study. The use web sites, e-mails and other technologies to negotiate internships and study experiences with partner universities build a process where faculty and students become sensitive to the wide variety of academic environments and cultures.
I. Virtual Lecturing (VL)

Virtual Lecturing (VL) technology is an emerging and promising technology to teach, examine and learn about cultural diversity. This would be the new aspect to make the academic partnership easier and accessible to all the corner of the world regardless the cast, color, races and economy. The virtual class through web-conferencing and virtual lecturing integrates virtual reality, natural interaction, and visualization.

The objective of virtual lecturing is to familiarize and provide access to the students, faculties and administrators of the socially and economically backward area of the next border of the world from the developed sectors. This class will allow students & faculties to develop diversified interaction skills while learning and teaching in a culturally diverse group around the globe. They have the opportunity to know about other and their practices.
II. Application of Technology in Higher Education for accepting cultural diversity

Prompted by technology in the twenty-first century, economic pressures are shrinking space, time, the variety of life styles, and cultural variation into a networked global society. Demands of globalization today continue to increase pressure on educators and educational leaders to change curriculum and learning in order to educate our children to become global citizens who preserve the variety and vitality of life. Leaders of educational multimedia design and applications have a special role in the shared leadership necessary for this change in education as emphasized by recent calls for cultural studies in instructional design (Rose, 2005).
There are many aspects of becoming a global citizen, and one of the most important areas of becoming a global citizen is awareness and understanding of the variety and relevance of all cultures. In addition, there is an increasing need for inter and multi-cultural competence to be able to survive in a networked global society. The issue of teaching and acquiring such competence is becoming a major concern in schools, in teacher education (Leeman and Ledoux, 2003), and therefore in the preparation of future faculty and designers of multimedia enhanced curricula.

Multicultural education requires critical understanding of connections among the each educator’s self, school, home, and culture, and it has to deal with sociopolitical realities about ethnic and cultural diversity within society and schools (Nieto, 2000).
Thus, in order to prepare the next generation to be confident in diverse cultures, educators need to gain multicultural competencies that will allow them to be actively involved in preparation of multi and inter-culturalized curricula and teaching. More multicultural over, the design and application of technology to support and model education becomes a critical issue in the increasingly digitized society of the twenty-first century.

Becoming a multicultural educator means first becoming a person that has multicultural competence. An educator in a global society needs to develop a multicultural perspective for teaching and learning (Nieto, 2000) in various school environments since culture is perceived as being shaped by living experiences and institutional forms organized around diverse elements of struggle and domination (Gay, 2003).
Competent educators and educational leaders reflect on their own multicultural beliefs, experiences, and behaviors and continue to develop professional competence and confidence in intercultural education in order to prepare students to become multi-culturally competent global citizens.

Multi and intercultural competence with a combination of technology-based approach and real-life experiences for future leaders of educational technology helps students become open-ended to the variety of approaches among partner institutions. Openness to other cultures helps students become flexible in adapting and respecting intercultural learning environments and collaborate for learning and research among different institutions that helped students gain some degree of multicultural competence; particularly openness to a new academic area and culture and flexibility to accept and adapt new knowledge, customs, and cultural values.
An intercultural learning environment provides various opportunities for future educators, faculties, and educational leaders to become multi and inter-culturally competent in a digitally networked global society.

Multicultural competence is a learning process in which students gain awareness of different culture, become sensitive to other culture, and have flexibility and openness in their academic culture. Further work is also required to find ways of using technology to enhance the lived experience and to accelerate the development of intercultural competence in a shorter time span, as well as to prolong engagement in intercultural community.
Today, possessing knowledge and having the ability to use knowledge in a world-wide arena is critical to personal and societal advancement. Likewise, having a skilled and globally focused workforce is perhaps the most important ingredient to any organization’s competitiveness in a world where competitors can come from next door or around the world (see Florida 2002, Friedman 2005, as cited by Van R. Wood).

The world’s economy is in recession. Every business is facing the challenges of keen competition and resource problems. In this situation, developing and building the sustainability in higher education is essential. We are practicing globalization and internalization in all business and services. We are facing distinct problems in the field of higher education like greater competition, relentless pressures to innovate, new worldwide markets and production options, growing concerns over cultural and environmental degradation. We must analyze and solve the issues related to these sectors. We cannot avoid the need and acceptance of cultural diversity for the sustainability of the higher education.
The growing competition among universities and other entities that now develop, distribute and market education are compelling academic leaders to seek unique ways to differentiate their programs from others’ programs. To meet these challenges, institutions of higher education are seeking ways to further connect their faculty, students and outside communities in a strategic infrastructure where ideas flow, new initiatives blossom, flexibility abounds, global reputations expand that simplifies partnering and alliances. We need to do something together now for the betterment in higher education and make it secured.
The sustainability of Universities and Colleges is a new challenge that must be dealt by everyone today. The leaders of higher education should be able to maintain the following aspects in their institutions for the life-long secured education in this era.

– Diversity in Faculties
– Diversity in Stream / Courses
– Diversity in Environment
– Diversity in Culture
Both domestic and international students' diversity must be woven into any institution’s “international fabric” if a genuinely globalized on-campus and community-wide environment is to be achieved.

Now, we as the leader in higher education should think to the possibilities how we can build the culturally diverse, socially acceptable, institutionally & nationally secured world of education that will cover the whole education world in a secured net. Universities should develop common academic structure and cover the need of this world through the consortium and alliances. This will help in expansion of enrollment of the students.
6. Sustainability in higher education

Now, we need to create a unique academic partnership and association and all the institutes must be ready to use technologies into the academic program to create a virtual intercultural learning environment among the partner institutes. Building online reading group, summer academy for short-term and intercultural academic experiences are the alternatives for sustainability.

Sustainability Triad: The Triple Bottom Line

In a 2010 International Residential Training Workshop on Universities & Education for Sustainable Development held in Greece, the principles and methods for sustainability in higher education were outlined and included a commitment by faculty, staff, governance, and operations to promote socially just, economically prosperous, and environmentally benign principles to create what they refer to as a “whole institute approach” to sustainability.

In addition to the teaching, learning, and development of concepts and tools for sustainability education, sustainability methods in higher education also requires policy and program implementation to encourage collaboration between disciplines, with other colleges and universities, and within local and global communities.
Sustainable Connections is a network of community-focused businesses, firms, organizations, and individuals committed to sustainable business practices, local purchasing, and economic and cultural diversity.

Sustainable partnerships are based on being flexible to new inputs and adjusting accordingly. If the partnership is seen as part of the organization’s academic processes and therefore longer-term, new ways of conceptualizing and planning for the partnership need to occur, including considering how it will be sustained and institutionalized.
Today’s world is the world of networking and consortium. Universities cannot ignore this fact to grow globally and compete in this era of globalization. What are institutions of higher education doing to create an environment that nurtures promising individuals and allows future knowledge workers to compete globally? How are such institutions responding to the needs of students, faculty and their communities such that each has the ability to prosper in the interconnected milieu of the 21st century. Do the leaders of such institutions profess a common body of thought, wisdom or insights with respect higher education and globalization? We need to find the answer of these issues together.

The value of university partnerships (whether they are developed by the university as a whole, or contained within various colleges, schools, departments or programs) with local, regional, national and international communities are well understood by leaders in higher education.
The focus of the university should not be location, location, location, but relation, relation, relation. A central ingredient to strong international programs is the establishment of meaningful relationships based on common values and goals and a sense of trust between partners.

In today’s globalized world this reality has ever been more important. Higher education has now become a real part of the globalization process: the cross-border matching of supply and demand. Consequently, higher education can no longer be viewed in a strictly national context.
Thank you !!!

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February 21, 2012
2012 AIEA Conference
Washington D.C
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