



The Challenges of the New Global Landscape and University International Outreach Programs

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The global trends that are transforming American society have important implications for the outreach activities of higher-education institutions. Driven by technological innovations that have resulted in communication and transportation revolutions, all aspects of life in the United States are changing. One of the most drastic of these changes is the extent to which the professional and personal lives of Americans are linked to people and events outside the United States. In Montana, arguably one of the most isolated parts of the United States, seventy percent of wheat and barley is now raised for Asian markets. This trend requires the American public to have more international skills and knowledge. Providing the increased international education the American public needs through outreach programs is a major challenge. This essay explores outreach activities universities can develop to help individuals and organizations to prepare for the challenges of today's interconnected international environment.

Coping with the New Global Landscape

Fluctuations in the Tokyo stock market spark almost immediate effects in the United States. News and information are disseminated around the world instantly. The quality of the U.S. environment depends on the actions of people on the other side of the globe. The following facts from the American Council on Education's new publication, *Educating for Global Competence: America's Passport to the Future* (1998), illustrate the impact of globalization on life in the United States.

- By 1993, 10.5 million American jobs were supported by U.S. exports.
- In the first half of this decade, U.S. exports accounted for more than one-third of U.S. economic growth.
- Between 1990 and 1993, export growth created 1.1 million new American jobs, and the number of export-related jobs grew six times faster than did total employment.

• A U.S. Department of Education survey indicates that 86 percent of corporations in America will need managers and employees with greater international knowledge in the coming decade.

These changes pose tremendous challenges to American society; while they are, in many ways, exciting and interesting, they can also be confusing, intimidating, and threatening. Furthermore, they occur so quickly that it can be difficult for Americans to understand and adapt to these new global realities. As a result, people sometimes react in dysfunctional and unproductive ways.

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U.S. universities can play a pivotal role in helping U.S. citizens and institutions to deal effectively with the reality of a global society. First and foremost, higher education must ensure that regular degree programs provide students with needed international skills and experience. Universities can also help American society

adapt to the challenges of the new global landscape through outreach activities. This essay discusses a few international outreach initiatives developed and coordinated by Montana State University.

Promoting International Business Capacity

While many large corporations have the resources to deal with the challenges of the global marketplace, this is frequently not the case with smaller businesses. Many small businesses may want to develop their export capacity but lack the internal expertise or the resources to develop this potential. Universities can be important allies to such small-and medium-sized businesses; two such programs have been developed at Montana State.

Montana is home to a substantial sector of environmental technology firms, a natural consequence of prioritizing maintenance of the state's high quality mountain environment, and the threats to it from mining, forest cutting, and other extractive industries. These mostly small firms have developed technologies that are potentially useful in other world regions; many firms are eager to develop export markets.

Working together, the MSU College of Business and an outreach arm of the university called MSU TechLink created a program to

organize and assist the export efforts of these companies. This effort was originally funded by a grant from the Business and International Education (BIE) Program of the U.S. Department of Education. Most recently, the BIE Program has awarded a follow-up grant to apply the technologies of these companies to the solution of environmental problems along the U.S.-Mexico border in Baja, California.

Another initiative is directed at small businesses that want to increase their exports to countries in the European Union. In this case, the MSU College of Business links these businesses with groups of business students taking courses at both MSU and MSU's partner universities in Ireland. The Irish and American business students, connected through the Internet and interactive video classrooms, develop case studies of participating businesses. By researching issues involved in developing the export potential of these Montana businesses, students help them to become competitive in the global market. In turn, students improve their business skills. This year, the Fund for Improvement of Post Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education awarded MSU a major grant to expand this program.

Creating Networks to Raise Awareness of Global Trends

In many parts of the United States, Montana included, the public generally is unaware of the extent to which the U.S. economy has evolved from relatively isolated local economies into an integrated global market. Technological innovations, together with the development of new economic structures such as multinational corporations and regional trading blocks (e.g., the European Union), have broken down the economic isolation that has insulated local and national economies from one another. This transformation has enormous implications for the manner in which states should view their economic-development plans and local businesses develop their business plans.

Montana State is attempting to address this challenge by developing a statewide network of leaders in business, government and education, and is conducting high-profile activities aimed at drawing attention to these issues. The three core partners in this coalition are the state's flagship universities, the University of Montana in Missoula and Montana State University in Bozeman, and the Montana Department of Commerce. The network's first event is a one and one-half day Montana in the Global Economy conference in the spring of 1999 to be attended by 100 delegates invited by Montana's governor.

Readers interested in developing this dimension of international outreach will find useful information in the 1996 book by Carol Conway and William E. Nothdurft, *The International State: Crafting a Statewide Trade Development System* (1996), and in the *Clearinghouse on State International Policies* newsletter from the Southern Growth Policies Board (1996).

Supporting Global Education in K-12 Classrooms

One of the most important steps toward addressing the challenges of globalization is to insert more international content into the K-12 curriculum. It is still the case that in most U.S. school districts, the first opportunity students have to learn a foreign language or to gain an international perspective is in high school; even these opportunities are often limited. Universities can join forces with local school districts to change this.

For example, starting in 1994 the Bozeman Public Schools embarked on the Foreign Language Education Program (FLEP), an ambitious, parent-initiated effort to bring foreign language and international education to elementary-school curricula. While embraced by administrators and teachers with enthusiasm, the teachers' lack of training in foreign languages and exposure to foreign cultures made it difficult for them to integrate FLEP into their classrooms.

An innovative Montana State-Bozeman Public Schools program was created to deal with this problem. Through a Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad grant from the U.S. Department of Education to the MSU Office of International Programs, a five-week training program in Ecuador on the Spanish language and Latin American culture was offered to Bozeman School teachers during the summer of 1997. Fourteen public school teachers and administrators, together with three MSU faculty members, participated in this intensive language-training and curriculum-development program.

As a result of this program, when students at one local school returned in the fall, they found that their school corridors had been decorated to look like an Amazon River rain forest — the first step in an exciting educational program about Latin America, its environmental issues, and its cultures. New lesson modules are still being developed to introduce Bozeman students to aspects of Latin American culture. Participating teachers with greatly improved skills now help students to begin the process of mastering the Spanish language. Their Latin American experiences have provided them the basis to make international studies come alive for their young students.

Encouraging International Community Service

Many universities encourage students to participate in community-service programs, promoting the tradition of learning through volunteerism in U.S. society while providing valuable contributions to communities. Montana State established an Office of Community Involvement to conduct such programs. This successful program provided yet another platform for developing international outreach programs.

MSU developed a reciprocal community-service exchange program with its partner university in Mexico, the Universidad Autonoma de Baja California (UABC). The program has grown out of the Office of Community Involvement's "Breaks Away" Program,

which offers MSU students a community-service alternative to the traditional spring break experience. MSU students travel to Baja, California, to spend spring break working to improve the communities surrounding UABC's campuses, and a group of their counterparts at UABC travel north to do community service work in the Bozeman community.

One of the program's many benefits is its ability to mitigate mutually held stereotypes about Mexico and the United States. It also makes an important contribution to development education — the field devoted to teaching about international economic development — by educating the American public about the realities of global economic development. Development education is a particularly important component of international outreach by universities, because public misunderstanding is so great in this area. For example, polls consistently show that a majority of Americans believe that as much as ten percent of the federal budget is spent on foreign aid. Further, Americans generally lack information about U.S. foreign aid programs, greatly overestimating U.S. spending on aid. For more information on this area, the quarterly newsletter *Ideas and Information About Development Education* from the International Development Conference in Washington, D.C., is useful.

Bringing the International Dimension Home with International Students

Probably the greatest underutilized resource international outreach universities possess is the nearly 458,000 foreign students on their campuses. These students represent a wealth of knowledge and information about other countries and their people. Their

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presence in our communities can make concrete the abstract issues surrounding global trends, and provide a tangible experience of the international dimension. The key to unlocking this resource is taking the students to homes, schools, and other community-institution facilities. Low-cost, effective international-outreach programs can be built around international students.

In the Bozeman area, Montana State and the Rotary Club operate the Bozeman Friends for International

Students, an informal organization for people who want to learn about other cultures while providing hospitality to foreign students. Participants are linked to a foreign student for the semester or year; they agree to arrange one family activity with the student each month.

In addition, the Office of International Programs operates a speaker's bureau which provides foreign students who speak about their countries and cultures on a request basis. More elaborate versions of this program can be found in Oregon, where foreign students can participate in such community-enrichment activities in exchange for reduced tuition.

Last but certainly not least, Montana State each year holds the International Street Food Bazaar. The bazaar provides an opportunity for the Bozeman community to experience the foods and cultures of the more than seventy countries represented in MSU's student body. Students volunteer to build booths which offer traditional foods and cultural views from their countries. Each year the event attracts more than two thousand people from the Bozeman community.

Building Partnerships with Community Organizations

The most successful outreach programs generally result from partnerships among universities and internationally oriented community organizations. There are many such prospective partner organizations throughout the United States. Montana State University has developed particularly close working relationships with two such organizations.

The Montana Center for International Visitors (MCIV) is a statewide organization which provides international opportunities for Montanans, mainly through programs involving foreign visitors brought to the United States through the U.S. Information Agency's International Visitor Program. MCIV's statewide mission makes it an ideal partner for MSU's international-outreach activities. At MSU's invitation, MCIV has recently moved on campus into the office space occupied by the Office of International Programs. While maintaining its autonomous non-profit status, this integration of operations will maximize opportunities for joint outreach programs. MCIV is part of a nationwide network of centers for international visitors established to support the USIA-IV program, so partnerships like this one are options for many universities around the United States.

A second organization with which MSU works on its international programs is Partners for the Americas, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., that creates linkages between U.S. states and counterpart regions elsewhere in the Americas. Montana's partnership is with the region of Patagonia in Argentina. MSU is an active participant in the partnership, encouraging the development of ties between the peoples of the two regions.

Several other organizations with community affiliates are good potential partners for universities in conducting international outreach activities. These include Sister Cities International, the World Affairs Council, and Rotary International. The Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange publishes *The International Exchange Locator* (1998), an excellent directory to these organizations.

Table One
Useful Organizations for University International Outreach Activities

- Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, Washington D.C., (202) 293-6141, www.alliance-exchange.org
- Group Projects Abroad Program, Center for International Education, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., (202) 401-9772, lungching_chiao@ed.gov
- National Council for International Visitors, Washington D.C., (202) 842-1414, pbinkley@nciv.org
- Office of Citizen Exchange, U.S. Information Agency, Washington, D.C., (202) 619-5348, www.usia.gov.
- Partners for the Americas, (202) 628-3300, www.partners.net
- Rotary International, (708) 866-3000
- Sister Cities International, (703) 836-3535, www.sister-cities.org
- World Affairs Council, (202) 544-4141

Developing a Program from Local Opportunities

These examples of international-outreach activities, many of them replicable at other institutions, illustrate some of the ways Montana State University extends its outreach efforts into the international arena. Clearly, each institution should assess its own resources and the opportunities to create programs that make sense and can work. Universities must realize the importance of helping the American public to cope with the challenges of the new global landscape and to begin to develop the outreach programs that will support this effort. ■

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About the Author

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