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BUILDING INTERNATIONAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIONS: The Evolving Role of American Teaching Centers

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In the last 30 years, teaching centers in American colleges and universities have moved from the margins of their institutions to the mainstream. Their roles have expanded exponentially: To their core task of providing instructional support for individuals, they have added cross-campus initiatives to promote pedagogical innovation, curriculum reform and redesign, assessment, interdisciplinary work, re-accreditation, and (most recently) leadership and organizational development training.

Meanwhile, during the last decade, there has been an escalating interest in globalizing American higher education, reflected in efforts to internationalize the curriculum; recruit international faculty and students; promote study abroad; and build international research, community-development, and outreach collaborations (Altbach, 2007). There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of international students on US campuses—particularly Chinese students, whose numbers have tripled in the last three years to 40,000 undergraduates (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). Campus leaders are turning to their teaching centers to assist not just domestic but also international faculty and students, enabling many of those centers to build their capacity.

Currently, countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the former Soviet Union, and South and Central America—fuelled by a desire to be globally competitive—are investing heavily in building, rebuilding, or expanding their higher education systems. They see faculty development as a way to ensure quality and promote efficiency as this rapid growth continues. Many countries have new quality assurance initiatives, not only with the goal of being ranked in the top 100 institutions in the world but also to promote excellence in teaching and to identify and assess student learning outcomes.

As a result, many US campuses are seeing an increase in international visitors and graduate students eager to study American higher education and its quality assurance mechanisms, including program review and accreditation; faculty performance review; and developing faculty expertise in teaching, learning, assessment, and the use of technology. They see teaching centers in American universities as potential partners who can help them plan and implement models of faculty development tailored to their unique needs and readiness. And funding—provided by agencies such as the British Council, the World Bank and the ministries of higher education in China, Iraq, Japan, and Taiwan—is now available to support these new collaborations.

This essay will provide a framework for building international collaborations in a post-colonial world; describe four cases involving partnerships between US faculty developers and campus leaders in Egypt, Iraq, Singapore, and Thailand; and conclude with the lessons learned from those experiences.

**Toward a New Framework for International Engagement**

Many US academics and faculty developers are rethinking the terms of engagement with other countries, much as they did a decade ago in working with local and regional communities. They are applying best practices established for outreach and service learning to their international work, with the guiding principle of ensuring mutual respect and benefit for all partners. They are moving from isolationist and colonial practices toward more collaborative, elastic, and responsive models of post-colonial engagement (Carew, Lefoe, Bell, & Armour, 2008; Chism, Gosling, & Sorcinelli, 2010; Lee, DeZure, Debowski, Ho, & Li, 2011; Manathunga, 2006).

An isolationist perspective is characterized by a lack of interest in international partnerships for the purposes of supporting faculty development. Isolationist tendencies can also be seen in the work of established faculty development networks that expect their international partners to conform to their language, customs, and practices.

In the colonial perspective, representatives from established faculty development networks view emerging international ones as similar to themselves but at an earlier stage of development. A colonial perspective may be rooted in a genuine interest in helping others, not in exploiting them, but it is nonetheless based on the assumption that what is workable and desirable in one culture will also be so in other cultural contexts. Those with this perspective run the risk of imposing their models, however unintentionally, and thereby denying their partners opportunities to adapt them or create...
others more relevant and appropriate to their needs and cultural priorities.

The post-colonial perspective represents an ideal to which many faculty developers now aspire. It is characterized by elastic practice—a process of adapting approaches to faculty development to the requirements of the partner country. Faculty developers with post-colonial perspectives engage in critical reflection about all of their practices, trying to avoid making assumptions about what is essential, what will work, and what is desirable. Instead they work collaboratively with their partners to identify what is relevant, useful, and appropriate to the context. Post-colonial practice is actively engaging in a mutual exploration and reassessment that can lead to mutual transformation (Lee, 2011; Lee, DeZure et al., 2011).

International collaborations are complex interactions that change over time and involve many types of engagement with numerous partners. Many have a mix of perspectives and practices that fall across the continuum from isolationist to post-colonial, and those may change as the relationships evolve. We offer this conceptual framework, then, for readers to use as a model and tool for planning international partnerships. We have used it in reflecting on our own collaborations, and it has helped us refine our practices and enhanced our interactions with our partners.

FOUR INTERNATIONAL FACULTY DEVELOPMENT COLLABORATIONS

Here we describe four international partnerships with different goals, processes, and products. All were mutually beneficial, successful, and transformative. All provided important lessons, which we will discuss at the close of this paper.

Case 1: Building a Teaching and Learning Center in Egypt

The American University in Cairo (AUC), one of the Middle East’s foremost English-language universities, recognized the value of assisting faculty in their growth as educators in a changing landscape for teaching and learning. In 2002, AUC received a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to establish a teaching and learning center. In September 2002, AUC inaugurated the Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT), the first center of its kind in the Middle East.

Ellozy and Sorcinelli sustained their professional relationship through a “virtual” correspondence, consulting on a range of faculty development issues. They exchanged information and ideas about their centers’ initiatives to support teaching (e.g., instructional consultations, workshops on course design, and other campus-wide workshops), formative assessment (e.g., mid-semester surveys, small-group instructional diagnosis), and the integration of technology. An early advocate of innovative teaching technologies, AUC’s teaching center developed a range of initiatives such as student technology assistants, e-portfolios, and multimedia instructional materials.

In phase three of the partnership, Sorcinelli traveled to AUC as a distinguished visiting professor in 2009. There, she worked with CLT staff, AUC faculty, and AUC key administrators on issues identified through self-study data (e.g., heightened demand for CLT services, increased pressure on faculty to acquire teaching skills while pursuing research agendas and interest in better measures of teaching effectiveness) and conducted several campus-wide sessions on teaching, learning, and mentoring. Throughout 2010, Ellozy and Sorcinelli explored via email and phone emerging issues on both campuses related to the assessment of teaching quality (e.g., student evaluations, peer review, teaching portfolios).

In the most recent phase, AUC invited Sorcinelli and Frank Moretti, executive director of the Center for New

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Media, Teaching and Learning at Columbia University, to lead a 10th-year program review of its thriving CLT and recommendations for its future. In turn, Sorcinelli invited Ellozy to consult with her about CLT’s successful initiatives to support undergraduate academic integrity and to promote emerging technologies. The pair also presented the outcomes of their collaborative work at a faculty-development conference in the US.

Remarkably, the AUC-UMass Amherst partnership has continued for a decade. It has been distinguished by the long-term, mutual mentoring relationship between the two center directors, who have never had any formal contract or agreement.

Their collaboration has advanced the development of a model teaching center in the Middle East and enhanced formative assessment programs and faculty training in new technologies at the UMass Amherst teaching center. It also has encouraged both directors to share what they have learned with international visitors to their campuses and with universities that they have been invited to in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

Case 2: Building Faculty and Organizational-Development Capacities in Iraq

During a visit to Michigan State University (MSU) in 2010, visiting Iraqi Fulbright Fellows were introduced to the work of the MSU Office of Faculty and Organizational Development (F&OD). Two of the Fulbright fellows (Dawood Atrushi from the University of Duhok and Bahaa Kazem from the University of Baghdad) recognized the value of a comprehensive teaching center for their institutions in Iraq. Consequently, they invited Deborah DeZure, assistant provost of faculty and organizational development at MSU, and MSU administrators Frank Fear and Robert Glew, who support international collaborations for the university, to work with them on a grant proposal to the British Council’s DelPHE Iraq Program. The grant was designed as a one-year collaborative effort, first to develop a strategic plan to establish a teaching center in Duhok and to enhance the existing teaching and technology center in Baghdad and second, to establish a virtual faculty development network for Iraq.

The grant aligned well with the mission and values of MSU as a land grant institution and the vision of its president, Lou Anna K. Simon, to establish “world grant” universities that would be engaged in international collaborations to co-create knowledge and sustainable global prosperity in the context of relationships based on mutual respect and benefit (Simon, 2011). The project offered the MSU faculty development program a new and compelling way to contribute to teaching and learning in a global context.

The MSU team led by DeZure and the Iraqi teams led by Atrushi and Kazem collaboratively developed a comprehensive institutional self-assessment protocol that reflected practices in Iraqi higher education and their goals for a teaching center. The MSU team then provided customized training in faculty development for three- to four-person teams from the Iraqi universities. The training included ten online modules on faculty development, monthly Skype sessions to discuss the modules, an online site to share resources, a library of books for each Iraqi center, and attendance at a week-long workshop for new faculty developers sponsored by the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education.

The project concluded with a one-week intensive workshop at MSU on college teaching and learning, best practices in faculty development, and individualized experiences reflecting the academic interests of the Iraqi team members. It culminated with presentations of the strategic plans proposed by the Iraqi teams.

The AUC-UMass Amherst partnership has…been distinguished by the long-term, mutual mentoring relationship between the two center directors, who have never had any formal contract or agreement.
The MSU team had been advised by colleagues with experience in international collaborations that planning is important, but flexibility is essential. Their advice was helpful and prophetic. Travel visas did not arrive when planned, requiring a major revision in the timeline. Skype sessions were often interrupted because of unpredictable service disruptions in Iraq. The challenges reflected the realities of life in Iraq and helped the US team to better understand the context in which the Iraqis are rebuilding their higher education system.

The goals of the grant have been attained, and the Iraqi strategic plans for their teaching centers have been reviewed and endorsed by their presidents and university councils. The Iraqi team leaders are seeking additional faculty-development grants to build on these achievements. The resources developed for this project are being shared widely in Iraq, giving them a life well beyond the grant’s termination.

At the same time, the MSU team had a chance to rethink models of faculty development and conceptions of what works, why, and for whom in a larger global context. For example, US faculty developers often bemoan the modest levels of accountability and reward for excellence in teaching in tenure and promotion decisions in American universities in comparison to the robust expectations and rewards for research, particularly at research universities. In contrast, the Iraqi team members focused on the far more fundamental and far-reaching challenges of establishing accountability for all domains of faculty performance, not just teaching. In a cultural context with a history of limited accountability, how does one prioritize and incentivize engagement in instructional development? The quality assurance initiative in Iraq shows great promise of promoting a culture of accountability, but these efforts have had to recognize and accommodate the complexities of a higher education system in rapid transition in a country undergoing social and political turmoil.

Overall, the experience was so positive and productive for both MSU and Iraqi participants that they are planning future collaborations, affirming the relationships that were forged through this partnership.

**Case 3: Establishing a Coaching and Review Project in Singapore**

The Peer Coaching and Review project (Peer-CARE) was initiated by the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at the Singapore Management University (SMU) in response to an external review panel’s 2006 recommendation that the university review its teaching evaluation methodology. The panel had proposed that SMU followed the two other state universities by looking into alternative measures of teaching evaluation such as peer review. The Ministry of Education endorsed the project and gave it 50 percent funding through its Quality Assurance Framework for Universities Fund (QAFU).

The staff of CTE initiated a call for proposals on POD’s listserv, eventuating in a contract with Nancy and Grady Chism from Indiana University. The close collaboration between CTE and the Chisms spanned two years, from April 2008 to March 2010. From the start, the partners conceived theirs as a reciprocal relationship based on mutual respect for each other’s talents and knowledge.

There were four phases to the project, which included three visits by the US partners and tasks between visits. During the initial phase, the CTE team conducted a needs survey among the full-time faculty. The Chisms contributed to the needs analysis by engaging in discussions with the university’s leadership, holding focus-group discussions with faculty from all six schools, and conducting classroom observations. Based on results of the data collection, CTE created a Peer-CARE program microsite and published newsletters to inform faculty and garner their support.

Phase 2 was devoted to the generation and revision of a peer coaching and review framework, processes, tools, and forms. Meanwhile, the CTE team recruited 28 faculty volunteers as peer coaches. The Chisms designed and delivered two workshops to prepare the coaches to conduct a systematic review of teaching for formative purposes.

Phase 3 involved the pilot testing of the processes and tools developed among the 12 coaching pairs. During their second visit, the Chisms explained the purpose and design of the Peer-CARE program to the university’s senior management and revised the process and instruments based on feedback provided by the faculty involved in the pilot test.

During the final phase, the Chisms conducted another round of coach-preparation workshops and involved both faculty and the academic leaders in feedback sessions for improving the process.

The outcomes of this close collaboration included the establishment of a program conceptual framework, the development of resources such as the Peer-CARE selector tool and forms, the generation of protocols and processes, and a design of the preparation program for coaches. To date, about 10 percent of faculty members are educated as coaches, and the program is in place at all of the university’s six schools.
The collaboration between the CTE and the US partners involved extensive sharing of information and ideas. As the two worked together, new insights emerged for each. Discussions about other faculty development activities, strategies for the future of the CTE, and larger cultural issues relating to Singapore and the US led to significant mutual education and friendships among the partners.

**Case 4: Involving Doctoral Students in Faculty Development in Thailand**

Following a Fulbright semester in Thailand in 2008, Nancy Chism continued to work with Thai colleagues by hosting visits of Thai scholars to the US and working on faculty-development projects with them. To accomplish several goals, she generated the idea of involving doctoral students in Indiana University’s Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program in several Thai universities’ attempts to enhance their faculty development programs.

In addition to furthering faculty development activity in Thailand, this partnership promised the reciprocal gain of preparing HESA students for consulting in higher education settings and increasing their knowledge about higher education in Southeast Asia. Through email and web-conferencing communication, as well as an in-person planning meeting six months before implementation, participating universities were asked to define the specific goals they had for the project.

In summer 2011, ten graduate students enrolled in a newly developed course, International Service Learning in Thailand. They spent the month prior to their departure (approximately 15 contact hours) completing an orientation to the Thai language, culture, and higher education context and participating in service-learning scholarships.

Once in Thailand, they spent the initial week becoming familiar with Bangkok and higher education in Thailand. They also participated in an orientation at one of six participating institutions: Bangkok University, Chulalongkorn University, King Mongkut’s University of Technology-Tronburi, Mahidol University, Silpakorn University, and Suan Dusit Rajabat University.

Students were assigned in teams at the universities to respond to the list of needs that each institution had supplied in advance. They worked daily on site while in Thailand to meet those needs. They also attended daily reflective seminars and wrote in journals.

Upon the completion of the experience, students participated in a half-day debriefing session in Indiana that included presentations about their consulting outcomes and cultural experience. Those presentations showed that they had met their goals (they realized how situation specific consultation is, acquired listening and feedback skills, practiced flexibility, and were responsive to the needs and requests of the universities) and acquired a better understanding of Thai culture.

The Thai universities expressed deep appreciation for the workshops that the students had developed and delivered; the interactions they had had with Thai students, faculty, and administrators; and the materials they had developed for the institutions. Plans for additional work were developed by Chism, the US students, and faculty and students at the Thai universities, including long-distance advising on the establishment of a teaching center and academic plan at one university, continuing common coursework between Thai and Indiana students at another, and implementation of courses for new lecturers at a third.

Involving doctoral students, many of whom were experienced administrators and teachers, to work on needs identified by the partner institutions modeled the reciprocity that can occur in international development partnerships.

**Lessons Learned**

Each collaboration involved valuable learning for all partners. Several themes emerged.

**Emphasize Planning**

Many international partnerships begin with invitations for one partner to offer a workshop, advise on the implementation of a teaching center or initiative, or help coordinate a project. Often, details are in short supply. Sometimes the reasons are cultural. The initiating person or unit may be accustomed to honoring those invited by avoiding presumption of any control of the interaction. More frequently, a lack of experience with the proposed activity renders the inviting party uncomfortable with defining its goals. Those invited sometimes are reluctant to be too direct with questions and concerns.

Yet it is extremely important to get as much clarity about the partnership as possible. Asking questions and submitting ideas in writing are strategies for furthering dialogue. In many cases, the planning will be protracted: electronic communication with international partners may be slower, and

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they sometimes need to consult with their supervisors. But patience will be rewarded.

**Know the Context**

In some cases, information on the education system of the host country will be readily available; in these cases, reading about the history and the conditions of higher education in the country, as well as its general political and cultural characteristics, will help immeasurably. In cases where that information is not publicly available, it is important to request background information from the host. Advance exchange visits can be productive when they are possible.

In the Singapore partnership, a preliminary visit and a detailed set of objectives, activities, and timelines helped guide the project. In Egypt and Thailand, a face-to-face meeting with the potential collaborators was essential for creating mutual ownership of and support for the project. The Iraq project found the collaborative development and use of institutional self-assessments and monthly Skype sessions helpful.

**Build Relationships Continuously and Be Flexible**

As partnerships develop, maintaining communication and remaining flexible are paramount. Forms of communication may vary from those usually employed by US developers. Some international partners are not accustomed to reading or responding to email as frequently as US academics; others work at a similar tempo.

Cultural norms may affect how communication takes place. For example, in the Thai partnership, the invitation letter to potential universities had to be issued by a Thai colleague, and disagreement was often not voiced but made obvious from inaction.

Last-minute adjustments had to be made across all the partnerships, ranging from visa issues and changes in team membership in the Iraq project to the changed agendas of the participating universities in Thailand to postponed travel to Egypt during the Arab Spring. Flexibility is key under such circumstances.

**Use Technology to Enhance Communication**

Technology adds time, cost, and complexity, but it makes ongoing communications possible. It provides online sites for document sharing. It extends the reach and impact of materials, activities, and products.

The online modules created for the Iraq project, for example, have been repurposed in a myriad of ways and will have a life beyond the grant to train future Iraqi and American faculty developers. The collaboration on an online newsletter and teaching-development library for the Egypt project extended resources on both campuses.

**Ensure that Both Parties Benefit**

Even though a partnership is generally initiated by one unit, it is important to conceptualize it for reciprocal benefit in order to prevent colonialist approaches and mindsets. For example, Egyptian developers taught their US colleagues about cutting-edge teaching technologies, while the US developers taught the Egyptian partners about mentoring and other aspects of faculty development. The Thai partnership provided the Thai universities with valuable consulting services and gave US students a transformative educational experience.

**Create Common Ground**

Institutions around the world, despite differences in culture, face strikingly similar challenges. Contextual issues such as resistance to change, the time constraints of faculty, and the reward system for teaching were similar across geographic boundaries, as were challenges in the use of active learning, instructional technology, and authentic assessment.

The result was that the accumulated knowledge and experience base of each partner offered significant benefits to others in the collaboration. The partners in all four projects realized that many of the core principles of good practice in developing and sustaining teaching and learning centers (e.g., emphasizing faculty ownership; cultivating administrative commitment; developing guiding principles, clear goals, and assessment processes; offering a range of opportunities) were universal and could be used to good effect in the partnerships themselves.

**Think Long-Term**

The power of an international collaboration is in its “multiplier effect,” in which the initial partnership is extended in fruitful and often unexpected ways (Fulbright, 1989). Partners in the collaboration with Egypt have interacted with each other’s staffs, observed each other’s teaching, developed workshops together, collaborated on an essay, socialized with each other’s families and various campus constituencies, and in many other ways interacted with a variety of people in the US and Cairo.
Lasting results of the Thai partnership include common higher education classes, invitations to present at conferences, and continued friendships, while the Iraq partnership is enabling MSU to participate in additional collaborations with Iraqi universities. Collaborations are not just about projects; they are about building and maintaining relationships over time.

Across all projects, the common lesson is that international faculty development collaborations are thought-provoking, mutually beneficial, and profoundly rewarding. They have the power to be transformative. For those who have worked in faculty development for many years, they offer the new frontier in practice, enabling the exploration of new terrain while serving both their home institutions and colleagues around the world.

Looking Ahead

Engagement in these collaborations offers the possibility of changing our thinking about teaching and learning in higher education. Empowered with new insights and skills, faculty developers in turn have the opportunity to shape teaching and learning in higher education around the globe.

For every faculty member whose outlook is broadened by new pedagogical theories and best practices from other countries, their students will gain some intercultural perspective. For every faculty developer who collaborates with partners in another country, many colleagues are likely to gain some appreciation of pedagogical and academic challenges and opportunities elsewhere in the world.

And each institution that encourages international education and intercultural partnerships can expect to broaden the perspectives and enhance the learning of students, staff, faculty, academic leaders, and the broader community it serves. If one were looking for levers to change higher education in a global context, international faculty development collaborations offer a productive and powerful option.
Resources