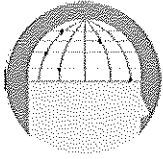

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



WorldWise

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June 25, 2014 by Guest Writer

Reflections From a Global Provost

*The following is by **Peter N. Stearns**, provost of George Mason University. Mr. Stearns plans to retire this summer after more than 14 years in the role. (<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Provosts-Advice-as-He/145889/>)*

One of the reasons I wanted to become the provost of George Mason was the opportunity to help shape a more global university. Of course, given Mason's Northern Virginia location near the nation's capital and faculty talent, a good bit was going on already, but as an institution we had the chance to accelerate global education in a number of ways. That effort formed a key part of what proved to be an exhilarating job.

Based on that experience, I offer several dos and don'ts on how to make a university more international.

1. **Don't be afraid to take some risks** in advancing global education, which also means you to have a willingness to accept some disappointments. Lots of promising projects fail to materialize, and a few simply fail. It remains important not to be too cautious. Mason for example had to close a fledgling branch campus (<http://chronicle.com/article/George-Mason-U-Will-Close-Its/1556/>) in the Middle East, a real disappointment, but then was able later to apply lessons learned to a new effort in South Korea.
2. **Be aware that a group of faculty are likely to remain skeptical** about global endeavors no matter what the administration does. Global programs often receive more scrutiny than domestic ventures, and there always seems to be a cluster of academics ready to claim that there was not enough consultation, that the effort is misplaced. To counter, hold open forums about the more ambitious projects, and be sure that a number of departments or university programs see explicit benefits in international projects. Despite this, a skeptical core will probably remain.

3. **Make sure that there's a clear, identifiable educational benefit.** In Mason's new Songdo campus in South Korea, which opened in March, we've worked from the outset to make sure domestic students who study there do so for at least a semester, mixing with the Korean and other Asian students. This was, frankly, unusual at such an early stage of an overseas outpost, but it's paid off in student enthusiasm on the home campus and enhanced knowledge of the region for American students, several of whom are, in fact, staying for a second semester.
4. **Make sure mutual benefit can be defined** in dealing with international institutions or individual students. Mason welcomes a growing number of international students. We value what they contribute to our global climate, and their out-of-state tuitions, but we work hard to make sure they receive the support needed for a successful educational experience. Indeed, with the number of foreign students still rising we will be adding further student services and faculty development to create a clearly constructive climate. Enhanced residence-life programs, around global living and learning communities, offer one example of next steps. Reciprocity applies to collaborations as well. With good institutional partners, like the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and Tsinghua University in Beijing, we emphasize projects like jointly taught classes that both institutions help to shape and where the interests are clearly shared.
5. **Keep a lot of balls in the air.** Global education requires diverse pathways and invites recurrent experimentation. It is not enough to offer robust study-abroad opportunities, though that's an important component. A core global office should not distract from global initiatives distributed across the university. Energetic imagination is essential.
6. **Be sure that all global efforts have a solid curricular base.** Study abroad without prior educational preparation is needlessly constrained. Programs like Songdo should link to a focused educational and research effort on, in this case, the North Pacific region (the opportunity here was one of the key attractions of the project in the first place). Multidisciplinary exposure to global issues is a core part of contemporary liberal education, and it warrants careful nurture and wide exposure.

A global effort requires a lot of work, and it's important to recognize that a project conceived by the provost is going to depend on collaboration from many staff offices and academic units—another reason that broad and open consultation is essential. I became known as a globalist partly perhaps because of the backroom grumping by unpersuaded faculty members about global goals, but mostly because real leadership and clear provost involvement were crucial.

The payoffs can be huge. Global institutional recognition and new global research opportunities for faculty are two cases in point. But the ultimate measurement is the student: the undergraduate, a diffident freshman, who spends a summer interning in a slum in the Philippines and comes back with a new purpose in life; the students who find an educational passion while taking classes in Mason's Confucius Institute and go on to study in China; the Chinese students who qualify for Phi Beta Kappa, or the Saudi student who embraces me after a reception because he's so excited about the classes available to him next fall. That's the reward. We only need to keep trying to multiply it.

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