

The International Mobility of the American Faculty – Scope and Challenges

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Internationalization has been drawing attention at U.S. academic institutions for the past two decades. The engagement of faculty is accepted as the key for sustaining higher education internationalization. Regardless of the increasing focus placed on faculty internationalization, faculty in the U.S. lag behind their foreign peers in international engagement. This article reviews studies that explore the factors that shape American faculty internationalization, raises awareness of challenges, and puts forward suggestions for improvements.

The world is growing flatter and globalization has never presented more opportunities and challenges for institutions of higher education in the United States than it does today. In the era of globalization, internationalization has been drawing wide attention at U.S. universities and colleges. Altbach and Knight (2007) indicate that internationalization in higher education is propelled to improve itself by an integrated world economy and global academic mobility, emphasizing that “internationalism will remain a central force in higher education” (p. 303).

Higher education administrators are recognizing the values of international activities to achieve global competencies. During the past two decades, academic institutions have initiated international activities ranging from curriculum internationalization, education abroad, faculty conducting research and activities abroad, recruitment of more international students to the U.S., and establishment of strategic international partnerships to achieve global competencies. Many scholars (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Fischer, 2009; Stohl, 2007) point out that the engagement of faculty is the key for developing and sustaining higher education internationalization in the 21st century. Faculty should be convinced to commit to internationalization in terms of internalizing

teaching, research, and service functions and examining how these activities enhance student learning (Stohl, 2007). O’Hara’s (2009) study echoed that international mobility is a key component enabling faculty to fulfill their roles and advance their impact on the academy and society.

This literature review will focus on recent studies that address the definition and benefits of faculty internationalization, explore the factors that shape American faculty internationalization, analyze participation rates of American faculty in internationalization and their perspectives, raise awareness of existing issues and challenges, and put forward suggestions to assist faculty to enhance internationalization in teaching and research.

DEFINITION OF FACULTY INTERNATIONALIZATION

Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach (2006) reviewed the history of faculty development and divided the history into five ages: the Age of the Scholar, the Age of the Teacher, the Age of the Developer, the Age of the Learner, and the Age of the Network. In the current Age of the Network, faculty developers network with faculty and institutional leaders to respond to issues and propose solutions to the challenges of the new century. One of the challenges facing

faculty in higher education in the Age of Network is internationalization. Knight (2003) provides a well-established definition of “internationalization” at the national, sector and institutional level as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2).

Finkelstein, Walker, and Chen (2007) refer to internationalization as “the increasing permeability of national boundaries in faculty research and teaching and the increasing mobility of students and faculty across borders” (p. 3), which specifies faculty’s role. If a university strives to be internationalized, its faculty members have to be internationalized first. Faculty members hold the keys to education in academic institutions. O’Hara (2009) used the term “scholar mobility” to characterize faculty internationalization, stating that the common definition of scholar mobility is the movement of scholars across national borders. Those scholars conduct research in a culture and region beyond their own and the mobility enables them to fulfill their roles and have an impact on the academy and society at large in three areas: knowledge transfer and innovation, influencing future generations, and shaping public perception (O’Hara, 2009, pp. 30-34).

PARTICIPATION RATES OF AMERICAN FACULTY IN INTERNATIONALIZATION EFFORTS

The disappointing participation rates of U.S. faculty members in internationalization are reflected in headlines such as, “U.S. academics lag in internationalization,” (Fischer, 2009a) and “U.S. faculty members lag on global engagement” (Fischer, 2009b). U.S. faculty members ranked the least mobile among the 14 countries studied in a 1992 Carnegie

Foundation International Faculty survey (Altbach & Lewis, 1996). Altbach and Lewis report that only one third of U.S. faculty members take at least one trip abroad for study and research. U.S. faculty members were less likely than their colleagues from the other countries in the survey to value connections with colleagues in other countries for their professional work. Finkelstein, et al. (2007) conducted a new international survey, the *Changing Academic Profession*, as a follow-up to the 1992 survey. This research finds that faculty in the U.S. lag behind their foreign peers in key measures of international engagement, despite the increasing focus that has been placed on faculty internationalization. The following section illustrates what aspects are included in faculty internationalization based on two large-scale international faculty surveys.

FACTORS THAT SHAPE THE AMERICAN FACULTY’S INTERNATIONALIZATION

In 1990, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching began a major research project in international education. As a part of the project, in 1992, the International Survey of the Academic Profession was conducted among 14 participating countries: Australia, Brazil, Chile, England, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, The Netherlands, Russia, Sweden, and United States. The purpose of the survey project is to explore problems they face “in an era of worldwide fiscal constraints for higher education and increased demands for productivity” (Altbach & Lewis, 1996, p. 87). The survey questionnaire included a variety of topics; for instance, faculty’s attitudes toward teaching and learning, the governance of academic institutions, national and international involvement, and morale. In the section on international dimensions of academic life,

topics included: international activities of faculty for the last three years, by teaching or research preference; perceptions of the degree to which the curriculum at their institution should be more international in focus; amount of travel abroad to study or do research in the past three years; perceptions of the importance of connections with scholars in other countries to the respondents' professional work; opinions on whether scholars must read books and journals published abroad in order to keep up with developments in their discipline (Haas, 1996). Altbach and Lewis's (1996) report indicates that U.S. faculty scored the lowest in a few sections, i.e., traveling abroad to study or do research, connection with scholars in other countries, reading books and journals published abroad, compared to their counterparts in the other 13 countries.

Finkelstein, et al.'s (2007) study conducted among 17 countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong – China, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and United States), was a fifteen year follow-up to the original Carnegie Foundation International Faculty Survey. Its results do not present much progress of U.S. faculty internationalization during the 15 years (1992 to 2007) between surveys. The unpublished paper finds that American faculty members still lag behind their foreign peers in key elements of international engagement.

This study focuses on two main questions pertaining to American faculty's internationalization (Finkelstein, et al., 2007): To what extent has the American faculty increased its "internationalization" in their course content and research? To what extent has the American faculty increased its "internationalization" in professional networking, such as collaboration on research projects and/or co-authorship of scholarly publication with international

colleges, and publication in foreign countries?

A sample of 5,772 faculty members at 80 four-year colleges and universities across the United States were selected randomly to participate in this online survey, via e-mail invitation, and later on a paper survey sent by mail to non-respondents. The overall response rate was 21.4%, which would be viewed as low for a paper survey, but according to the authors, its rate falls safely within the acceptable range for on-line surveys. This study is based on a four-stage model for understanding individual faculty member's internationalization in their teaching and research: basic demographics, early socialization and educational background, institutional pressures, and current work situation.

Finkelstein, et al. (2007) claim that it is complicated to compare the 1992 and 2007 survey response because only three items from the two surveys are comparable. The data analysis shows that despite the continued comparative insularity of U.S. faculty, a significant segment of the faculty respondents, about 53%, reported having integrated international perspectives into the content of their courses; and one third are active in research, collaborated and/or co-published with colleagues worldwide (Finkelstein, et al., 2007). Faculty members who spend years abroad are more likely to incorporate international issues in their teaching and have a research agenda with an international scope than those who do not.

Based on the survey data analysis, this variable is even more influential than being foreign born or being under institutional pressures to internationalize (Finkelstein, et al., 2007). In terms of work role, faculty members who teach in non-STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields are more likely to incorporate international perspectives in their courses. Another distinguishing feature is that faculty

leadership tends to direct faculty to internationalization initiatives. This research has identified and enlightened the elements in faculty internationalization in a systematic and comprehensive way.

One vital element missing in the faculty internationalization scope identified in the two studies above is information on to what extent the American faculty members have increased internationalization in their interactions with international students and faculty in the U.S. The scope, in the studies, primarily focuses on faculty's international engagement outward; however, domestic interaction with students and faculty from other nations is worth being explored as well. For instance, how should American faculty update curricula to take advantage of participation of international students in a class? How should American faculty get fresh perspectives in research and teaching from visiting international faculty in the academic department?

ATTITUDES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE AMERICAN FACULTY TOWARDS INTERNATIONALIZATION

It seems to be widely held among U.S. academics that to improve the higher education system significantly, perspectives, practices, and achievements developed in other regions need to be incorporated into the curricula of our universities, and possibly our non-academic administrative processing. Examples of administrative processing include supporting services provided by the Office of International Affairs, Office of Financial Management Services, and other units on campus. Nevertheless, there are some American faculty members who tend to be cautious about how internationalization moves forward. According to Haas' (1996) analysis on *The American Academic Profession*, while 72% of American faculty

members in the 1992 Carnegie survey agreed that internationalization of the curriculum in universities is a trend and it is extremely important for U.S. schools to implement internationalization, some faculty members expressed concerns. For instance, one of the concerns is state government's failure to subsidize international education and lack of international funding sources. The surveys also document some U.S. academicians' negative attitudes towards foreign professors. One faculty member considered internationalization of curriculum ridiculous and believed more attention should be focused on making students and faculty aware of cultural differences (Haas, 1996). Seventy-five percent of faculty members agree that "connections with scholars in other countries are very important in my professional work" (Haas, 1996, p. 379); the study also states 74% believe that "in order to keep with developments in my discipline, a scholar must read books and journals published abroad." Ninety-two percent of faculty expressed eagerness with being involved in faculty exchanges and advocated methods and procedures for promoting faculty exchange. This survey analysis also presented some statements revealing faculty members' short-sightedness, such as the statement made by one faculty member who only noted that our students should know more about Canada and Mexico.

The Finkelstein, et al. (2007) survey does not have a specific question focusing on faculty attitudes toward internationalization. Further research on faculty members' perspectives and attitudes towards internationalization is necessary to explore current trends and provide constructive advice to institutional leaders to enhance international initiatives.

In spite of the common acceptance of the value of faculty internationalization, some hesitance and reluctance still exist with regard to international engagement among

American faculty. What current challenges do faculty members face in internationalization?

BARRIERS TO FACULTY INTERNATIONALIZATION

Dewey and Duff (2009) identified four types of barriers to faculty internationalization based on data from a case study reviewed about the School of Architecture and Allied Arts (A&AA) International Initiative Committee at the University of Oregon: lack of coordination and information available regarding engagement in international initiatives; limited funding availability for international work; specific administrative policies and procedures that are disincentives to participation in international initiatives; lack of staff and personnel to facilitate international initiatives.

Dewey and Duff (2009) found that limited financial support makes it difficult for faculty to secure funds for traveling overseas and other expenses in the international context. Current university financial policies make faculty's international engagement inconvenient and discourage them to take initiatives. The work load of developing international curricula is time-consuming and a burden to faculty, which is added as extra to their required position responsibilities. At any rate, not all faculty members bring the same value of international work into their vision of professional success.

Increasing the population of international students on campus is considered to be an important means to engage faculty into internationalization. However, Dewey and Duff's (2009) study indicates that cultivating more international students may raise questions, for instance, increased faculty workload and issues of possible displacement of domestic students. Inviting more international faculty to teach,

conduct research, and provide academic activities, can enhance domestic faculty's interaction with peers from other nations in their disciplines, but grant money for inviting international faculty is limited.

Administrative procedures and visa processing for this type of invitation are bureaucratic and lengthy.

In terms of study abroad programs, Dewey and Duff's (2009) research claims that the management of these programs is troublesome. Intensive time and extensive work involved in a study abroad program, as well as some curricular issues, discourage faculty members from continuing leading programs. Regardless of faculty's heavy work load in these programs, some administrators may believe it is a privilege for faculty members to participate in a study abroad program (Dewey & Duff, 2009). Further, existing administrative policies and procedures raise challenging practical issues, such as replacing faculty and making salary payment when faculty participate in long-term research and teaching overseas. These issues may have a negative impact on faculty members' decisions on committed international activity.

Stohl (2007) explored a few more barriers in his study related to faculty engagement in the internationalization of higher education. He stated that few universities incorporated an international dimension into their mission. He also pointed out that universities tend to only recognize faculty members' international reputations in research rather than their international collaborations in teaching, research, and service as a whole. Furthermore, junior faculty members are often encouraged to produce publications and they claim that they do not have extra time for international incentives. This value was supported by the national report, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* (Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008),

which showed that the percentage of institutions that have made international work for faculty a consideration in promotion and tenure decisions decreased from 96% in 2001 to 92% in 2006. These conclusions resemble Dewey and Duff's caution regarding administrative policies and procedures as disincentives. However, the number of institutions that give recognition awards for faculty's international activity has gone up to 21% from 12% in 2001. Stohl's (2007) research also examines another hurdle to international collaboration, i.e., regulatory inhibitors. According to Stohl, his former university did not allow state funds to be used for faculty international travel to conferences due to the treasurer's different interpretation on state funds. What means and approaches does the literature itemize for U.S. institutions to take to address these challenges?

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

First, literature in this review implies that faculty internationalization needs more than passion and conceptualization of higher education internationalization and globalization. It requires systematic institutional plans of rationales and missions, incentive policies, abundant resources, and efficient administrative support. Universities should create incentive systems and support the foundation for faculty involvement in international activity. Central university administrators should review all policies and procedures regarding international teaching and research activities to systematize them for faculty's needs.

Secondly, as Dewey and Duff (2009) concluded in their study, a balance between centralized and decentralized authority and capacity is demanded for smooth internationalization processes. For example, strategic plans and goals are expected to be

centralized by institutional administrators, but the actual international activity is conducted by an individual faculty member, therefore decentralized. The power conflict between two parties needs to be resolved for institutional success in faculty internationalization. Finkelstein, et al.'s (2007) research addresses a similar concern: institutional influence becomes less effective if faculty research involvement and interests are controlled. The research results indicate that faculty from a higher education institution where faculty members take the primary responsibility in establishing international linkages are three times more likely to collaborate with colleagues cross borders than those from institutions where internationalization is driven by administrators. Faculty members with leadership roles in campus internationalization initiatives appear to be higher achievers in internationalization.

The data from Finkelstein, et al.'s (2007) study suggests that faculty members who spend one to two years abroad after obtaining their undergraduate degree are almost twice as likely to incorporate international issues into their teaching, four times more likely to collaborate with foreign colleagues in research, and are more likely to have co-authored with a foreign colleague than those who had not spent any time abroad. Those with three or more years abroad are 2.6 times more likely to include international themes in the content of their courses. As Finkelstein, et al. (2007) write, "it is clear that the surest road to internationalizing the U.S. faculty is to make sure that they receive some international experience" (p. 25).

A topic that is worth exploring is a comparative study between the factors that shape the American faculty's internationalization and those that shape internationalization of faculty in other nations. As Finkelstein, et al. (2007) point

out, there is no information in their findings with this regard. Their conclusion, on the basis of surface data from surveys, claims that American faculty members are behind in internationalization compared to other countries in the survey, but the surveys do not ask for comparable statistics in other nations, given their different political and educational systems. From my experience as a previous faculty member in a Chinese university, in most Chinese universities faculty members are required to conduct research or study in a developed country for a minimum of one year before being considered for tenure. Internationalization is not their internal drive for professional development, but a policy centralized by the institution and government. Examples like this contextualize findings from U.S. surveys. Addressing more questions like the above will hopefully help U.S. faculty overcome the relative isolation and accelerate the steps of scholar mobility.

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