

The Frontiers of Internationalizing Higher Education SIT Symposium—August 2010

Introduction

I wish that you could see the audience from the podium. It is a vivid reminder of all the ways World Learning is working to internationalize higher education. In this room, we have people who represent our work through SIT and the International Honors Program (IHP) to give students from US colleges and universities transformative experiences studying abroad. We also have our DC-based World Learning staff members who run inbound programs that bring people to the United States for study tours and academic exchanges. We have our DC-based Education and Civil Society staff members who work across the globe with faculty and administrators to enhance the capacity of higher education in the developing world. And finally, we have our graduate faculty who train people to run international programs. Together we are:

- Running exchange programs to over 50 countries
- Welcoming visitors from over 140 countries to the US
- Working globally to enhance higher education institutional capacity
- Training the next generation of international education professionals

The scope of our work is remarkable.



There are many ways to frame my remarks. I want to define the topic as exploring how we run international programs that produce human beings who have the capacity and commitment to create a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. In other words, I want to talk about internationalizing higher education as it advances the human condition.

I want to frame my remarks in this way for two reasons. First, this is World Learning's mission. Our work is about unlocking the potential of people to make the world a better place. We are a capacity-building organization that works globally to enhance the capacity and commitment of individuals, institutions, and communities to create a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Our vision and mission are centered on improving the human condition.

Second, I believe that the vast majority of our work remains rooted in the liberal arts. Despite the tendency in the United States to reduce the liberal arts to the study of academic content, I believe the liberal arts are really about preparing students to lead lives worth living. Here, I often like to quote the historian William Cronon, who wrote that one of the most sacred goods a society can provide somebody is "an education that celebrates and nurtures human freedom and in doing so nurtures within its students the growth of human talent in the service of human freedom." He goes on to define a liberally educated person as somebody who can: (1) listen and hear, (2)



read and understand, (3) talk with anyone, (4) write clearly and persuasively and movingly, (5) solve a wide variety of puzzles and problems, (6) respect rigor as a way of seeking the truth, (7) practice humility, tolerance and self-criticism, (8) understand how to get things done in the world, (9) nurture and empower the people around them, and (10) follow E.M. Forster's epigraph "Only connect..."¹

I want to take the next 30 minutes and provide a snapshot of the international education field. I will start by teasing out the contradictions and paradoxes that are shaping the field. Then I will turn to the frontiers that will shape the next three to five years. Finally, I want to articulate a vision for how World Learning could position itself at the frontiers to best fulfill our mission.

Tensions Shaping The Internationalization of Higher Education

Clearly, US colleges and universities are internationalizing. In 2007–2008, almost 270,000 students studied abroad. This represents a 150 percent increase over the last decade and an increase of 8.5 percent from the year before. The number of international students enrolled in colleges in the United States increased to 671,000 in 2008–2009. This was an increase of 8 percent from the year before. Internationalization is part of just about every college's strategic plan. Even in a difficult economic environment, colleges and universities have retained their commitment to internationalizing.²

Yet, this positive trend has some contradictions.

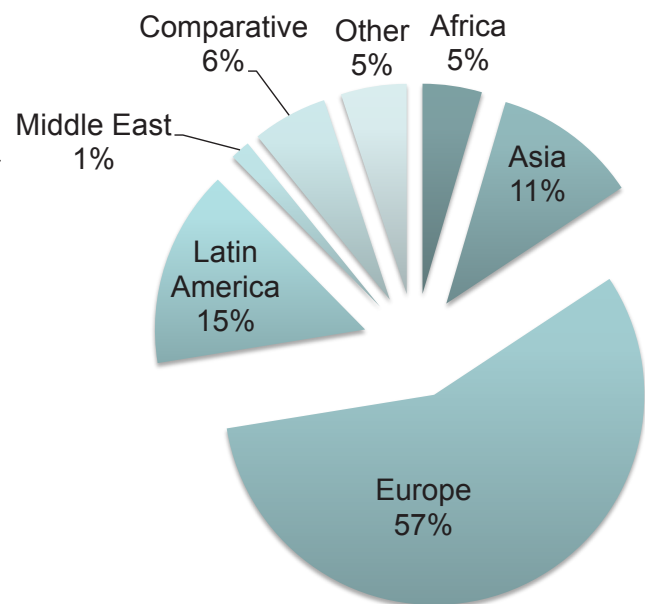
First, while we are sending more students to study abroad, they tend to go to the places that are most like the United States. London remains the most traveled destination for US college students. I have nothing against London. But, if one is going to study abroad, London is probably the non-US-based place that is most like home. Of all students studying abroad 57 percent are in Europe, while a mere 5 percent are in Africa and 1 percent in the Middle East.

Second, we are sending students abroad so that they can learn about the diversity of the world, but our students fail to represent the diversity of the United States. Study Abroad attracts participants who are heavily white, female, and geographically centered in elite colleges (which tend to be concentrated on the East and West coasts). For example: less than 10 percent of students who study abroad are black or Hispanic, despite the fact that they make up over 25 percent of all higher education. Over 65 percent of students are female. Often,

I joke that SIT is becoming the first all-female study abroad provider.

Third, while we are spending a lot of time and financial resources to send students abroad, they often don't interact with the host populations once they arrive. In the United States, I worry that too many of our international students are living in residential halls with other international students, studying in academic departments where international students cluster; working with international lab partners, and eating with their

Regional Variations in Study Abroad Locations



1. See William Cronon, "Only Connect." *The American Scholar*. 1988. Volume 67:4, p.73. See also, *The Qualities of the Liberally Educated Person* at <http://www.aacu.org/resources/liberaleducation/cronon.cfm>

2. All of the dates in this section comes from IIE Open Doors report. See <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>

international peers. I also worry that many US students participate in programs that are very culturally thin. They don't learn languages, stay with local families, or really get to know anybody beyond the other students from the United States studying on the same program. They are doing the US college experience in a different time zone. One can stand in parts of London, Florence and many other places and believe that you are on a US college campus. If we are not careful, we will master the art of sending Americans abroad without them ever really leaving the country.

These contractions are shaping how internationalization is evolving as a field, but the outcomes are far from determined. When I get into private conversations with presidents and provosts they clearly want to internationalize their campuses, but there is a remarkable lack of clarity on what this means. There are also huge differences between institutions in how they define the internationalization project. Our task is to shape these emerging views.

Getting this right is not complicated. We need to make sure that our internationalization efforts have high academic quality, deep cultural immersion and a civic education dimension. We also need to make sure that programs are delivered globally and we need to do much better to ensure that our programs are accessible and include a broad spectrum of students. Doing this means shaping the frontiers of internationalization efforts.

The Frontiers of Internationalization

By frontiers, I mean where the action will be over the next three to five years. These frontiers are neither inherently good nor bad, but are important. Our task is to shape them to ensure that the internationalization of higher education advances the human condition.

The first frontier is the shift from "study abroad programs" to "internationalization initiatives." While semester-long study abroad programs will remain important, they are no longer the foci of energy and action on US campuses. The future will be much more diverse in the kinds of programs and more specific to the individual institution. Duke has Duke Engage. Princeton has the Bridge Year programs. Goucher is sending every student abroad. This shift will include more short-term faculty-led trips, customized programs, and summer internship/service opportunities. World Learning is well poised to play a lead role in helping campuses internationalize in all kinds of different ways. I will come back to this topic in a minute. It needs to drive our strategy over the next three to five years.

The second frontier is the way technology is reframing what it means to be abroad. The last time we met, we were debating if we should allow laptops and cell phones on our programs. That debate is over. My daughter just returned from The Experiment in International Living in China. At the airport, I told her to enjoy China and not to bother communicating with us. But after two weeks, I could not help myself. I sent her a short email: "Margaret-how are you doing? Email us back." She read the email in a remote part of China on a friend's Blackberry. Parents are going to communicate and our participants are going to stay plugged in.

I am interested in technology as it opens up a world of potential to create a truly global campus that can take our programs in exciting new directions. Take for example, the iPad. This is a "disruptive" technology that allows us to re-imagine how to connect across space and time. For starters, the iPad can enable us to do deep cultural immersion by strengthening language acquisition; pushing students to do better research; and giving our faculty access to lectures given by other ADs. It can allow us to link to sending schools in ways that would lengthen the relationship and experience of our faculty and students. If we get out in front of technology, we can harness the potential to do many of the things we have talked about for years. Our programs need not remain isolated in a place. They can now benefit from the breadth and depth of the World Learning network. This is just for starters. I imagine a World Learning where International Development and Exchange Program (IDEP) participants from Iraq are talking to our SIT Study Abroad Rwanda students about conflict reconciliation work. The possibilities are endless for how we can use technology to interact and connect in meaningful ways that deepen our programs. Imagine what we can do.



The third frontier is the shift towards “global production networks of higher education.” Internationalization is moving beyond branch campuses and exchange agreements. The future will hold much more fluid and diverse sets of relationships. Education is going to look more like a production network, defined by individuals connecting to each other, as opposed to institutions forming agreements. Those connections will emerge around projects and initiatives. As such, they will have more purpose and fluidity. Recently, I sat on a panel for the US Summit and Initiative on Global Citizen Diplomacy. We were looking at submissions for innovating in higher education internationalization efforts. I was struck by the myriad of ways faculty and students are connected to each other. Research teams of African and US faculty are working together on joint research. Student organizations have relationships with communities around projects. We need to understand the ways that networks are forming to define how people act in the world in ways that move beyond organizational structure. As part of this, there is going to be a lot of activity to develop capacity of higher education institutions in the developing world.

The fourth frontier is the interest in creating more bridges to and from the undergraduate experience. Our work has been focused on the undergraduate experience, especially juniors who want to study abroad. But, more emphasis is being put on helping students transition into higher education through gap/bridge year programs, and from higher education to the professions. Our work with Princeton University is just one example. As many of you know, we are running a program where matriculated students from Princeton spend a year with us doing service before they attend Princeton. It has been a fascinating experience. We have now been approached by a range of universities asking us to develop similar kinds of programs.

The last frontier is the interest in leveraging the student experience as they “bring the world back home.” We send people abroad so that they can learn about themselves and their societies. Our intent is to unlock their potential to return to their home communities and work to make the world a better place in ways large and small. SIT has lots of wonderful examples of students getting socially engaged and then starting innovative projects.

For example: we have a recent SIT student by the name of Jessica Posner, who studied in Nairobi. During her program, she worked with Kenyan peers from the Kibera, Africa's largest slum. Jessica became friends with a



young man from Kibera, Kennedy Odede, who aspired to go to college, but did not have the means to do so. Jessica encouraged Kennedy to apply to her home college, Wesleyan, which offered him a full scholarship. From Wesleyan, Jessica and Kennedy developed a plan for starting a free school for girls in Kibera. After two years of project development and fundraising, they returned to Kenya to build The Kibera School for Girls. Today, the tuition-free school serves 50 girls, is run entirely by Kenyans, and includes a community center, health center, library, and garden.

What is interesting is the number of students, who embrace and embody social innovation. For every Jessica, there are a dozen students who could reach similar heights if given a little

bit of help. This is true across our programs. Many of our international participants return to their home countries with ideas on how to design and develop programs that would use the ideas they learned on their study experiences. But, they often are missing the resources to get those projects off the ground. Partially this is about seed funding, but it is also about on-going mentorship. We need to do a better job helping participants leverage their experiences when they come back.

Positioning World Learning for the Future

How might we harness the inherent opportunity in these frontiers in ways that will advance the human condition?

In my first year, I have been struck by the power and possibility of our global network of educators, development specialists and trainers. This global network includes current faculty and staff, former staff, community partners, alumni, and other friends who share our vision. It is a vast network of people who have a loyalty to World Learning and will often (in amazing ways) drop what they are doing to help us advance our mission. They believe in World Learning because of their experience with the organization. This network gives us a strong platform off which to work.

I have also been struck by the consistency in what we do across our various units. It does not matter if we are talking about SIT Study Abroad, IHP, SIT Graduate Institute or our DC-based World Learning staff. There is remarkable consistency in the vision, mission and pedagogical approaches. A few months ago, I spent an amazing evening with some participants from Turkey who were participating in an IDEP program we ran on youth leadership. Watching them interact reminded me of nights with SIT students in Ecuador and the graduate students on our campus. There is a DNA that cuts across this organization and shapes what we do and how we do it. It starts with who we attract to our program, and moves quickly to the way we craft programs to help participants develop a unique range of skills, attitudes, awareness and perspectives that last a lifetime.

We need to position World Learning as the platform-of-choice for academic institutions, government entities, foundations, institutions or anybody else who wants to design and deliver high quality programs that unlock the potential of people to make the world a better place.

We need to build off these strengths to position ourselves for the future. Right now, we are a US-based organization that runs great programs for students from US institutions of higher education and the United States government (USG). The future of World Learning needs to be as a global platform for driving quality and innovation in our space. In particular, we need to position World Learning as the platform-of-choice for academic institutions, government entities, foundations, institutions or anybody else who wants to design and deliver high quality programs that unlock the potential of people to make the world a better place.

Our mission, vision, and pedagogy should remain the same. Also, our core activities in the international education space will continue to be semester-long programs, in-bound study tours, academic exchanges, higher education capacity building, and international graduate education programs.

But, there are fundamental shifts in how we think about ourselves and operate as an organization. The major shift is from an organization to a network. Organizations have silos. Networks have teams of people who come together around projects. Organizations have clear and well defined boundaries and borders that separate offices, programs and divisions. Networks have fluid, dynamic and open boundaries that make it hard to tell where something starts and stops. Organizations are based in a place. Networks are based across space and hence not located (or headquartered) in any place. Successful organizations in the future will operate much more like dynamic and nimble networks, than tired and stodgy organizations.

Another major shift is from being US based to a truly international. We need to imagine, as an organization, what it would mean to be truly international. This would shift how we operate, and the kinds of programs and partners we seek. The future is going to be more international. For example: what would it mean to target a country or region of the world (e.g., China, Turkey, India, Brazil, the Middle East) and spend two to three years seeking out new board members, funders, participants while also developing new programs that focus on the region.

Finally, we are talking about moving from a program provider to a platform. We need to position World Learning as the platform-of-choice for academic institutions, foundations, government entities, or anybody trying to use international education to advance the human condition. This means moving away from being a reactive organization that mostly waits for RFPs to be issued or for students to sign up for programs. Instead, we need to be a proactive organization shaping the field by seeking out new partnerships, helping to define agendas, and being visible as an open and accessible platform for new ideas and initiatives.

Successful organizations in the future will operate much more like dynamic and nimble networks, than tired and stodgy organizations.

Conclusion

This week is important. Among the many things that will occur organically, I hope the following will happen. We will strengthen cross-organizational relationships, starting the process of moving from an organization to a network. There are too many people on the World Learning platform who do not know each other exists. World Learning consists of many micro-networks. This week is important in starting to connect these networks into a larger platform. Beyond the networking this week is about sharing knowledge. We have so much to learn from each other. As I travel around to our programs, I am often struck by the power of the teaching. This week, we will share that knowledge with each other. Finally, the symposium is a celebration of who we are and what we do and the difference that it makes in the world. I am so deeply proud of World Learning. The next few days will give you a chance to share the pride in what you do and how it is part of something larger.

I hope it is a great few days. Thank you for giving me the honor of starting it off with these remarks.

