

## **Why International?**

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There is a classic story that has been traveling around academic circles for many years. It involves a philosophy professor who in a stroke of brilliance develops a one question, one word final examination—"Why"? On the day of the final examination the blue books are distributed to the class and the examination begins. All of the students save one write frantically filling one, two, even three blue books. A solitary student seated in the far left corner of the examination room sits with blue book closed and hands folded, looking tentatively off into space. It is obvious that he is giving deep thought to the metaphysical roots of the question. Finally with only five minutes remaining in the examination period he opens his blue book, jots down an answer, meticulously closes his blue book, gets up from his seat, ambles to the front of the classroom, and places the blue book on the professor's desk. Immediately after the student leaves the room the professor opens the blue book to discover the student's response—"Because!"

This anecdote leads us to the question at hand—Why international? Given the harsh fiscal reality of today's academic landscape it is impossible to convince "bottom line" oriented (or in some cases "belly up" avoiding) senior administrators that the answer to the question is because! Given the present day reality of tight and often shrinking budgets along with multiple demands for scarce resources, a more "well rounded" response is needed to answer the question.

### **Institutional Background**

The following is an attempt to answer the question at hand. It is based on experiences at a multicampus, state assisted community college located in eastern Massachusetts. During the past five years Middlesex Community College has given birth to, nurtured, and raised a major International Education Program despite significant reductions in operating funds provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Between 1988 and 1992, state support for Middlesex was cut by some 30% (\$12,000,000 to \$8,600,000). By fiscal year 1992 state funds accounted for only 44% of the college's total budget. It is important to note that public colleges in Massachusetts receive no county or local

funding. Moreover, during this time Middlesex constructed two new campuses, comprised of eight buildings, at a total construction cost of nearly \$45 million. The college has opened and operated these campuses without any additional operating funds from the Commonwealth.

Despite these fiscal constraints, Middlesex has established a comprehensive International Studies Program as a cornerstone of its educational mission. The commitment to international programs at Middlesex is fundamental to the college's identity as an institution of access, opportunity, and academic excellence.

The international programs at Middlesex are primarily but not exclusively with two emerging market oriented countries—Russia and the People's Republic of China. The college has also engaged in smaller programs with Denmark, Hungary, Vietnam, South Korea, South Africa, Japan, Czechoslovakia, and Ireland.

#### **Why International?**

Returning to the question at hand, there are at least 10 good reasons why institutions should become involved in international programs. These programs will:

- expose our students to a broad international perspective
- generate new revenue streams for the institution
- share the institution's expertise with less developed countries
- broaden your campus' perspective
- broaden your community's perspective
- gain access to grant opportunities
- generate positive media exposure
- contribute to the professional development of faculty and staff
- restimulate a "can do" attitude on campus.
- It is hard work but it is also fun.

#### **Expose Students to a Broad International Perspective**

This is the first and foremost reason for engaging in international activities. I will always remember the comment by a seasoned senior faculty member when international education was first mentioned on campus: International programs are "Nonsense—our students don't know where Boston is much less Beijing." He was absolutely correct but for the wrong reason. This is the best argument for international programs, not a reason to ignore them.

The essential point is that students often do have a limited perspective. They often also hold a very provincial outlook on life. It is our responsibility as educators to help broaden their world view. We sponsored a three week, 12-student study tour of the People's Republic in August 1992, changing the lives of these students forever. Several have emerged to take leadership roles on campus; they are reading *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, attending lectures both on and off campus, and inviting speakers to the campus. And, very importantly, they have been guest speakers in many classes, broadening the perspective of many additional students.

#### **Generate New Revenue Streams for the College**

There are an infinite number of contract training opportunities for community colleges overseas. We have had very profitable contract training experiences, both here and overseas, with Russian bank presidents and Chinese business people. The training contracts from these programs are well into the "six figures" and have generated a comfortable margin for the college. Other colleges in Massachusetts have developed similar programs with Czechoslovakia and the Ukraine.

#### **Share the Institution's Expertise With Less Developed Countries**

American technology and know-how is still very much the envy of the world. Developing countries around the world look to us to assist them as they convert from planned to market-based economies. Who is better positioned than community colleges to provide this critically important training and expertise?

#### **Broaden Your Campus Perspective**

Involvement with international activities inevitably will bring many international visitors to your campus. What better way to learn about apartheid than to host Visiting Fellows from South Africa; what better way to learn about the development of the banking system in Russia than to host Russian bank presidents? International visitors on campus provide opportunities for the entire college community to learn and grow.

#### **Broaden Your Community's Perspective**

International visitors on campus provide the institution with an opportunity to bring community leaders and community residents on campus to participate in a variety of activities including lectures, receptions, film series, and supper series. There are also many opportunities for developing linkages with local service clubs and regional organizations such as Chambers of Commerce to cosponsor many internationally focused activities.

**Gain Access to Grant Opportunities**

Involvement in international activities opens the door to many prestigious grant opportunities. Directly as a result of our international programs we have been able to secure funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop a Latin Studies Institute. Title VI funding for an East Asian Studies Institute and funding for two visiting Fulbright scholars have also occurred as a direct result of our international programs. Involvement in these programs is critical because it helps to enhance and extend the academic programs at our colleges.

**Generate Positive Media Exposure**

Not only do the campus visitors generate significant local and regional media exposure for your institution and the international programs, but they also help to position your institution as a source of international information. Increasingly reporters from local media have called with questions for faculty seeking their advice on international issues or events. In addition many local business people will contact the college seeking assistance in developing international trade opportunities. One of the major reasons for the success of the International Trade Certificate Program at our college is the media exposure generated by our other international programs.

**Contribute to the Professional Development of Faculty and Staff**

The opportunity to develop a successful international program can have a profound impact on faculty and staff. The satisfaction of writing a successful grant proposal and hosting a visiting delegation from Shanghai or Shangdong Province can inspire and reinvigorate faculty members. The opportunity to travel will have a profound impact on the development of faculty and staff. It also adds to the educational experience of students. To sit in a classroom and hear a faculty member say "When I was in Beijing I observed....." adds a dimension to the learning experience that is difficult to calculate.

**Restimulate a "Can Do" Attitude on Campus**

Much has been written about the graying of college faculty and staff. International programs will not eliminate the "graying" but it does help to reinvigorate faculty. On my most recent visit to the People's Republic of China my traveling companion was a senior member from our economics faculty. As a result of his experience he has been transformed into a tireless supporter of international programs. He has also been energized, exploring grant writing and other opportunities. The same

transformation has occurred with others who have been involved with international programs. It is difficult to express but international programs can and do energize individuals.

**It is Hard Work but it is Also Fun**

There is no doubt that international programs are hard work requiring occasional personal sacrifices such as an Easter Sunday hosting a delegation from Beijing or spending Christmas Eve in Jinan, Shandong Province. This, however, is a small price to pay when you also experience the joys of teaching a class of 27 Chinese entrepreneurs about Western accounting methods, meeting a Visiting Scholar from Chile, discussing the political and social climate in South Africa with a Visiting Fellow, and watching the growth in students resulting from studying Confucian philosophy in his hometown of Qufu.

International programs are rewarding, stimulating, reinvigorating, broadening, fun, and if that is not enough, they can generate significant revenue for your institution. I am sorry my answer to the question "Why International?" is not as simple as the student's answer in the philosophy examination. I am pleased we have discovered the meaning behind "because."

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