Internationalizing the Curriculum:
An Inventory of Key Issues, Model Programs and Resources

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Introduction

Internationalization of the university means far more than interpersonal or even inter-institutional cooperation across borders. It is a necessary, vital and deliberate transformation of how we teach and learn and it is essential to the future quality of higher education in Canada, indeed to the future of Canada.

AUCC Standing Advisory Committee on International Relations, 1994

The heart of the internationalization of an institution is, and will always remain, its curriculum precisely because the acquisition of knowledge...is what a university is all about

M. Harari, Internationalization of Higher Education, 1989

In the year 2000, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada released two seminal reports on international education at Canadian universities, Progress and Promise by Jane Knight (OISE/University of Toronto) and Canadian Efforts to Internationalize the Curriculum by Fraser Taylor (Carleton). Both publications take stock of initiatives undertaken during the politically tumultuous decade from 1989 to 1999 that included the collapse of Eastern Bloc dictatorships; civil war and “ethnic cleansing” in the Balkans, Rwanda and other parts of Africa; the end of apartheid in South Africa; the US invasion of Iraq; renewed jihad in the Middle East; the “opening” of China and the end of British rule in Hong Kong – all of which had a profound effect on immigration patterns worldwide, which in turn have indelibly altered the face of cultural diversity in Canada, especially in its urban centres. By 1999 Vancouver had essentially become an Asian city and Toronto was well on its way to becoming one of the most multicultural cities in the world. The impact of the ensuing globalization on higher education would be immense.

If the reports by Knight and Taylor in 2000 placed more emphasis on “promise” than “progress” in their assessment of how Canadian universities had risen to the challenge of internationalization, the 2006 update afforded by York University’s symposium on Internationalizing Canada’s Universities was not much more heartening. AUCC Director of International Relations, Pari Johnston, reported that universities are continuing to move “from an ad-hoc to a strategic approach to internationalization” and that more institutions are “developing comprehensive and valuable ‘mobility portfolios’” (“International Dimension,” slides 5-6). But there seems to be a widening gap between policy and practice, for change “on the ground” is happening at a snail’s pace. Despite a growing number of bilateral agreements to create opportunities for students, faculty and researchers, 2003 data still indicated that less than 1% of university students participated in short-term, for-
credit international education opportunities (compared to 3% in the US, see Shubert).

The chief barrier appears to be lack of financial resources: all the good will, strategic rhetoric, and genuine interest in expanding internationalization programs will not translate into higher participation rates until exchange programs become affordable and faculty are provided with the incentives and supports required to overhaul the curriculum. Canada’s per capita spending on international education lags badly behind major competitors, e.g., Germany $5.02, UK $3.29, US $2.64, Canada $0.70 (Johnston, slide 16).

While there are notable examples of internationalization among individual universities – York, Waterloo, UVic, Calgary, Laval come to mind – the absence of a national strategy hampers Canada among global competitors (we are singular among OECD countries in having no federal office responsible for higher education, cf. Shubert), and the absence of a provincial strategy places Ontario universities at a greater disadvantage (Quebec, Alberta, New Brunswick, British Columbia all have well-developed provincial strategies). For some reason, internationalization has never been a priority for COU.

The purpose of this working paper is to synthesize the current discussion among international education stakeholders in Canada, underscore the centrality of curriculum reform to internationalization efforts, and broaden the discussion among faculty and administrators to include those who may view their academic discipline or sphere of activity as culturally neutral. Knight underscores the need to be “mindful of the larger and more philosophical questions” surrounding the internationalization agenda. At the conclusion of Progress and Promise, she asks us to consider how our efforts to internationalize Canada’s universities will be viewed from the year 2020:

What achievements and values will be attached to internationalization – development, partnership, exploitation, solidarity, quality, commercialism, prosperity, homogenization, competitiveness, pluralism, advancement – when stakeholders and researchers of the future reflect on the past 20 years? … Are we aware and alert to what the consequences of our actions might be? (90)

Some Terminology and a Few Definitions

Although globalization and internationalization are intimately related, educators go to great lengths not to refer to the “globalization of education.” Knight defines globalization as “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas … across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way due to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture and priorities. Globalization increases and reflects the growing connectivity and interdependence among nations” (Knight & de Wit 1997, p. 6, as cited in Knight 2006, p. 2). She proposes the following working definition of internationalization: Internationalization at the national/sectoral/institutional levels is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2003, p. 2).

Further, internationalization is an “ongoing, intentional process that affects the way we construct knowledge and is systemic; this changes the fabric and culture of the university” (Green).

Since 1999, educators have distinguished between internationalization abroad and internationalization at home (Nilsson 1999). The former describes the more conventional crossborder activities of individuals: student mobility programs and exchanges, and faculty conferences, sabbaticals, exchanges and research networks. The latter encompasses students and faculty as a collective on the domestic front and “refers to the international and intercultural dimension of the curriculum, the teaching/learning process, research, extra-curricular activities, in fact a host of activities which help students develop international understanding and intercultural skills without ever leaving campus” (Knight 2006, 7).

Internationalizing the curriculum = “The process of curriculum development or change that is aimed at integrating an international dimension into the formal and operational aspects of the curriculum where formal refers to course content and materials and operational to teaching and learning methods,
grouping of students, the place and time of courses, etc.” (Van der Wende 1995, as cited in Taylor, 4).

*Multicultural* generally refers to domestic ethnic and racial diversity; *intercultural* describes an encounter with cultures of other nation states or diasporas (Green).

**Internationalization at Home: The Curriculum**

While *Progress and Promise* expressed concern with the lack of interest and low priority accorded internationalization of the curriculum, Taylor’s study drew a more positive conclusion: “from the evidence presented in this study, albeit partial, it seems that Canadian institutions are responding to the need for international curricular change. Some of our practices and approaches are even innovative in both national and international terms” (27).

Taylor’s study utilized the analytical framework of the six-nation research project, “Education in a New International Setting,” initiated by the OECD’s Centre of Education Research and Innovation (CERI) in 1993, adding Canada to the comparison of Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands.

**OECD Typology of Internationalized Curricula:**

1. Curricula with an international subject (e.g., international relations, European law, etc.)
2. Curricula in which the traditional/original subject area is broadened by an internationally comparative approach (e.g., international comparative education)
3. Curricula which prepare students for defined international professions (e.g., international business, management, accounting)
4. Curricula in foreign languages or linguistics which address explicitly cross-cultural communication issues and which provide training in intercultural skills
5. Interdisciplinary programs such as area studies covering more than one country
6. Curricula leading to internationally recognized professional qualifications
7. Curricula leading to joint or double degrees
8. Curricula of which compulsory parts are offered at institutions abroad staffed by local lecturers
9. Curricula with content especially designed for foreign students.

(*It was recognized these were not mutually exclusive categories and that some internationalized curricula fell into more than one category.*) (Taylor, 4)

Taylor’s pool of evidence, however, was limited primarily to 60 HRDC-funded projects and submissions to the Scotiabank-AUCC Awards for Excellence in Internationalization in the “Curriculum Change” category. His results, then, are based on relatively few cutting edge programs, the majority of which entail student mobility. They do not provide a good picture of “internationalization at home.” The OECD/CERI typology is useful, however, and one we should keep in mind.

Presenters at the York University symposium in March 2006 were less encouraging: again and again throughout the two-day conference we heard reports of how many faculty either reject or are uncomfortable with the concept of internationalizing the curriculum. At the heart of that discomfiture is the implicit threat to the established view of knowledge as universal and based on objectivity, truth, and rationality. Truly internationalizing the curriculum entails embracing new forms of knowledge and acquiring more than a passing understanding of “multi-varied modes” of thinking and learning (Bond 2006). In this worldview, knowledge is a cultural construction.

In a less threateningly polemical exposition of the challenge, Darryl Reed and John Dwyer view internationalization in terms of the goal of the university: the search for knowledge that is truthful. Their critical framework is nevertheless post-modern:

Truth seeking must always be indeterminate and can never be completely neutral. It always needs to be able to interrogate or deconstruct itself. The appropriate stance of the professional seeker of truth, therefore, has to be reflexive. That stance requires three foundational propositions: 1) the cultivation of a self-reflection as an account of one’s own presuppositions, 2) a critical edge that provides alternative possibilities, and 3) an openness to other viewpoints. In other words,
truth seeking has to consider its own origins, purposes, relations of means to ends, and position with respect to other discourses. Truth seeking requires intellectual freedom and implies an interrogative or questioning stance to whatever is given as knowledge, including the canonical beliefs and artefacts of the academy and its disciplines. (“From Critique to Contribution,” 2)

What is clear from the presentations of educators such as Sheryl Bond (Queen’s) and Reed and Dwyer (York) is that faculty are now much more aware of the complexities of internationalizing the curriculum. Far beyond the rather simplistic notion of adding international dimension to existing aspects of the curriculum (which most of the OECD typology implies), internationalizing the university curriculum is in fact educational reform and entails at least as much reform/re-education/redirection of faculty as revision of curriculum. The operative word is transformation and with this in mind, Bond calls on faculty to “embrace a more meaningful definition of internationalizing learning” that involves:

- substantive knowledge about the social-cultural content of other societies
- alterations in how one responds to cultural differences
- how one behaves in intercultural circumstances, and
- how one maintains one’s own cultural integrity while understanding and working with others (“Transforming the Culture of Learning,” 2-3).

The Macro-Dimension and the Micro-Dimension

It may be useful to distinguish between two levels of activity or decision-making in connection with internationalizing the curriculum. The macro-dimension refers to the set of activities that requires decision-making at the level of the program, academic unit, or institution (Schuerholz-Lehr/vanGyn, 5), such as the creation of programs, special degrees, or graduation requirements (e.g., second language proficiency3). One could also add hiring policies and practices to the list.

The micro-dimension “is that part of curricular innovation and change over which individual faculty members have control” (Schuerholz-Lehr/van Gyn): course revision, personal research, and individual professional development. It is the micro-dimension that is of greatest interest to Schuerholz-Lehr and van Gyn, who have developed and implemented a course re-design workshop they view as “a powerful method for transforming faculty perspectives on the importance of internationalization of the curriculum and of a learner-centred curriculum in general” (“Internationalizing Pedagogy,” 24).

Another faculty development program has been developed at Malaspina University-College in BC with the intent of providing faculty with “the tools to integrate intercultural perspectives into the redesign and delivery of their curriculum through the development of each individual’s level of intercultural sensitivity” (“Internationalizing Faculty,” 20). Again, the focus is on the faculty member.

Internationalization vs. Cultural Diversification

These are two intimately related and yet different motivations for curricular revision/reform. Internationalization of the curriculum has the goal of preparing students to live, work and function as citizens of a global society; it acknowledges globalization as a persistent and pervasive trend in the creation and transmission of knowledge. Cultural diversification of the curriculum, on the other hand, recognizes that Canadian society is increasingly less Western, less Northern, and less homogenous.

While these two motivations move hand in hand, the latter is far more disturbing to the Western-trained

3 Notable in this context is the alarming decline in second language proficiency requirements for undergraduate degrees since 1990: 1991 = 35% of survey respondents, 1993 = 16%, 1999 = 12.5% (Progress and Promise, p. 48). With the growth of cultural diversity in student populations, language-learning resources have shifted significantly to ESL. The hidden resource of heritage languages is frequently overlooked and almost never leveraged.
and oriented academic than the former. How does, for example, an art historian or political scientist whose education, research, and expertise are grounded in the Western experience speak to and connect with students whose backgrounds and experiences are non-Western? Cultural sensitivity training is not the only issue here. What are the implications for the many PhD students whose research interests and training are steeped in the Western canon? Is there a ‘core knowledge’ that is essential to the Canadian university experience?

Implications and Issues

- Internationalization strategies need to clarify what is meant by “internationalization” within the context of the specific institution.

- How much of the strategy is driven by curricular reform and what does that entail? Who is responsible for internationalizing the curriculum? What is the timeframe?

- Research and frameworks: Is the student-centred education reform model the only or even the best model for internationalizing the curriculum? Transformation is underway, but who is steering this ship?

- Research and frameworks: The Australian experience. There are vastly differing views of what that experience has been and adds up to. Is it a model to be emulated or avoided? Cf. Simon Marginson, York University Symposium Papers.

- What are the implications of internationalized curricula and “multi-varied modes of learning” for academic honesty, intellectual property issues, and the advancement of knowledge in a given discipline? Where and how do new learning technologies and networks fit into the picture?

- Does it make sense for Canadian (Ontario) universities to go it alone? Who should be at the table in developing an Ontario internationalization strategy? A Canada-wide strategy? What other areas / forms of collaboration should be explored?

Recommendations

- Establish a joint COU/MTCU Task Force to develop a coherent internationalization strategy for the Province of Ontario that goes beyond the current emphasis on recruitment initiatives (e.g., NAFSA and Trade Missions) and fosters the development and coordination of cross-regional and inter-institutional collaborations for student and faculty exchanges, joint programs and research projects. The strategy should include concrete goals and plans for developing the necessary infrastructure to support these initiatives.

- As a first step: Create a provincial inventory of existing student and faculty exchange programs, including information about how they are administered and how academic credit is awarded.

- As another step: Establish an International Travel Bursary program that can be accessed by every university student in Ontario. The greatest deterrent to international study is financial resources.
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