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Review

Global experiences in health and technology information communication (TIC) between Fairfield university in USA and Bambey university in Senegal

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While international relationships and study abroad opportunities are very common in the arts and humanities, such opportunities are also becoming more common in allied health. University of Bambey (Senegal) in collaboration with Fairfield University (USA) initiate global activities for many reasons, for example personal interest, encouragement of school administrators, community/public health course expansion, or implementation of global service learning in order to improve the attainment of health millennium development goals in Senegal. Opportunities for Bambey University faculties may be educative, research, or for technical experiences. For students, they are participating in a E-learning program such as Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis. Social, cultural and political systems dictate differences in beliefs, values, assumptions, and norms between and among residents in all countries. Lack of understanding of these differences may result in misunderstanding and embarrassing and troublesome situations. The HED program gives opportunities for faculty who desire global experience. The Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the US government and designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. The university of Fairfield faculty may serve as consultants and site visitors for Bambey university teachers. Some consultants work with host partnerships communities on continuing education settings others may work with faculty on curriculum development in health education programs and Information and Computer Technology (ICT).

Keywords: Universities, Bambey, Senegal, Fairfield, USA.

INTRODUCTION

In an age of globalization and interdependence characterized by international flow of goods and services, there exists the free exchange of ideas through the

education. Distance and time are no longer barriers for human activities, including international education exchanges and collaboration. There is increasing importance placed on understanding concepts of trans-culturalism and diversity into post-secondary education by the United States (US) government and collegiate administrators. Since 1998, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) Higher Education

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Development (HED) has created over 300 university partnerships involving more than 190 US colleges and universities from Africa (www.usaid.gov).

The overview highlights the various roles faculty may assume in a host country, provides practical considerations to help faculty prepare for international travel and gives some general guidelines for exchanges and collaboration. The discussion is intended to increase the awareness of Western, including American educators and scholars, of the challenges and opportunities involved in international education exchanges and collaboration. A fundamental goal of such efforts is to maximize their positive effects in to promote global understanding, collaboration, and peace and maximize any potential negative effects. Faculty can become involved in international activities in a variety of roles. There may be encouragement by university administrators due to relationships with international colleagues or for other defined reasons. There are different opportunities for faculty involved in research internationally. Faculty may desire to conduct cross-cultural or comparative research studies in two or more countries. Another option is to be either the principle investigator or part of a US team. In addition, the roles of external reviewer on a dissertation or thesis completed in another country, or a reviewer for a non-American journal may be available. Further, lack of understanding of these differences may lead to outcomes that are inconsistent with or even against the original intent of both entities. Based on decades of personal and professional cross-cultural experiences, this toolkit provides some tips and advice to US students and faculty interested in engaging in international activities

About the project

Fairfield University has been awarded \$299,607 by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Higher Education for Development (HED) for a three-year grant that will integrate service learning, middle school health education and educational technology in Senegal for the College Universities Regional de Bambey (CUR-Bambey) faculty and students and local middle school teachers by leveraging new learning technologies as appropriate for the local environment for teaching health education topics. Three Fairfield University professors share co-directorship of the grant named "The Use of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) and Service Learning to Develop Health Curricula": Winston Tellis, Ph.D., Stephen and Camille Schramm Chair in Information Systems and Operations Management and Vishnu Vinekar, Ph. D., assistant professor in Information Systems and Operations Management, who are faculty members in the Dolan School of Business; and Elizabeth Langran, Ph.D., assistant professor and director of the

Educational Technology Program in the Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions.

Rev. Paul J. Fitzgerald, S.J., senior vice president for Academic Affairs at Fairfield, called the grant "an exciting opening for us," one more way in which the University is engaging with Africa. "Africa is one of the five priorities for the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) worldwide. This grant allows Fairfield professors to bring their expertise to the direct and indirect benefit of children, bettering their health care and building capacity among their teachers."

Service learning is a pedagogical approach that links academic study and community-based service so that each is strengthened and both are transformed.

In keeping with the Jesuit identity, this grant will enable the University to build on a sustained history of partnerships with international institutions of higher education in Nicaragua, Russia, Central Asia and several European countries.

The ICT project will leverage new learning technologies as appropriate for the local environment for teaching health education topics. Local middle school teachers will become familiar with the pedagogy of using technology to teach content. While the first content area to be taught with the technology will be health education, the pedagogy can be applied to other content areas as well.

In January 2011, Professors Tellis, Vinekar and Langran will travel to Senegal to conduct a needs assessment, in partnership with CUR-Bambey. Together they will develop a curriculum after consultation with the advisory board of the pilot school in Dakar. The baseline data collected at this time will inform their decisions for the following years.

The partnership is designed to strengthen the capacity of CUR-Bambey's community service program to be self-sustaining by utilizing a "train-the-trainer" approach.

The project was inspired several years ago by then Fairfield undergraduate and Stags basketball player, Mamadou Diakhate, '08, whose senior project was a proposal to introduce computers into his boyhood school in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal.

The professors worked on a grant application to HED with an ultimate goal of training the local Senegalese faculty in Service Learning, Information Technology, and Health Education. "Given the fact that only one proposal would be funded under HED's request for application, we are thrilled to have been chosen," said Dr. Langran.

"It is a team effort, in which each one of us brings skills and experience that should raise the dignity of the people in the rural areas, along with a new awareness of issues that affect them directly," Dr. Tellis said. "Best of all, it is a model that will develop the local expertise, such that we will not be needed towards the end of the project, if we have done our job as planned."

"The environment in rural Senegal could be similar to the poor areas in Delhi where I have worked with children in the slums learning to use computers," said Dr. Vinekar.

The project will involve several trips to Senegal by the Fairfield faculty members. "We will leave behind a self-sustaining operation that will enhance the wireless network transmission, and education infrastructure in the rural areas," Dr. Tellis noted.

Practical Considerations in International Education Exchanges and Collaboration

The USAID/HED grant supports the exchange of faculty each year. Accordingly, Fairfield University hosted four distinguished professors from University of Bambey, Senegal. The itinerary is included in this document so that the details of each day's activity might be clear.

Mr. Youssou Kasse, Mr. Massamba Seck from ICT section, and Dr. Papa Gallo Sow, Dr. Awa Gaye from the Community Health section at the Diourbel campus attended the Integrative Pedagogy Institute at Fairfield University in 2011 and 2012. The institute is designed to bring together, teams of professors who are working to integrate material from assorted areas into a particular course or courses.

- Mr. Kasse and Mr. Seck joined a team of professors from the Dolan School of Business (DSB) who were designing the integration of advanced Excel applications into the Introduction to Information Systems course. This exercise is critical to the use of excel in all relevant DSB courses, and is increasingly expected of DSB graduates in the commercial world.

- Dr. Sow and Dr. Awa joined a team of Nursing faculty who were designing the integration of Community Health service into their curriculum. Their perspectives were invaluable to the group, since he has extensive experience in delivering health care in deprived areas in a developing country.

Both teams spoke highly of the visiting professors, whose keen intellect and unique experience informed the discussion during the deliberations.

Prior to the Institute, the professors met with Nursing faculty, and accompanied Dr. Eileen O'Shea to a service site in Bridgeport, CT. Bridgeport has a significant population in financial distress, and the Nursing students serve the population in a variety of ways. The professors were very interested and were impressed with organization of the clinics. They met with Mr. Christopher Johnson, Director of Study abroad programs, who advised them to engage the faculty in discussion of the possibility of sending students to Senegal. Mr. Johnson lived in Senegal earlier in his career. Later that afternoon, they met Dr. Susan Franzosa, Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions, where Dr. Elizabeth Langrana co-director of the grant, previously taught courses. They traveled to Bridgeport with Dr. Tellis to meet Mr. Hector Sanchez, Principal of Batalla Middle School. Fairfield University students serve this school by

helping the students to improve their language skills, especially for students for whom English is a second language. It is a modern school in a blighted area, which was of great interest to the visitors. They also met with Dr. Don Gibson, Dean of DSB, where Dr. Tellis and Vishnu Vinekar are located, both of whom are co-directors of this grant.

They had an important meeting with Dr. Jack Beal, Dean of the School of Engineering. In describing the courses, and projects in the school, he touched upon items of great interest to Mr. Kasse and Dr. Sow. Mr. Kasse could find a research partner for his interest, and the engineering students under the direction of Dr. Wook-Sung Yoo, will consider designing and implementing a solar power installation at the UB campuses. The professors also worked briefly with the faculty from engineering at the Institute, where Dr. Yoo was a member.

They had a constructive meeting with Rev. von Arx SJ, President, and Rev. Fitzgerald SJ, Senior Academic Vice President, whose interest in Africa was discussed. They would welcome an initiative that would expose Fairfield University students to the realities of rural Senegal, provided professors of both institutions deem the service, mutually beneficial. Accordingly, Dr. Sow will continue to discuss with the School of Nursing professors to design an appropriate experience (Figure 1).

Issues and Perspectives

Issues and Perspectives of international education exchange and collaboration may vary between the host country and the country of origin. Exchanges and collaboration must begin with a discovery of strengths in the host community. A lack of resources in a developing community is not indicative of a deficit in knowledge and expertise. The flow of knowledge and expertise should be reciprocal between the host country and country of origin. For example, in international education exchanges and collaboration, all are learners. Thus, when a power differential is communicated, the likelihood of a sustainable relationship is challenged. Like the US, developing countries have many reasons for promoting international education exchanges and collaboration.

Opportunities to develop faculty

International exchanges can provide opportunities to develop junior faculty. One of the top challenges and priorities for many nursing programs in developing countries is to educate and develop their faculty into competent educators and productive scholar-researchers. It takes years for junior faculty to become



Figure 1. Meeting with Rev. von Arx SJ, President, and Rev. Fitzgerald SJ, Senior Academic Vice President

seasoned educators and scholar-researchers. Importantly, there is a frequent shortage of mentors for junior faculty.

International exchanges and collaboration provide such exposures and experiences through which these junior scholars can immerse, learn and grow under the guidance of seasoned mentors.

Integration into the global health community

Integration into the global health community can enhance both clinical practice and knowledge development. International education exchanges and collaboration facilitate the process of integrating into the global nursing community because such activities promote awareness, comparison, and self-evaluation. On practical benefit for both students and teachers in developing countries in the opportunity to acquire health knowledge in the English language. This is important as many of the publications of research and theory development are in English. In some countries, knowledge of English is a prerequisite for entrance into graduate study programs. Attending international conferences, collaborating with scholars/researchers in studies, and writing joint papers

all provide avenues to promote mutual understanding and make clear what is needed to function within the international nursing community. For instance, international health education standards established and promoted by the WHO (www.who.int) and the International Council of education clarify the gap between the current health education in a developing country and what is needed to catch up with the developed countries.

CONCLUSION

Philosophically, people involved in international experiences influence others while being influenced during the process. There may be a perception that Western educators and scholars are the carriers and imparters of knowledge while developing countries are merely receivers of knowledge. In fact, Western scholars and educators also learn from the exchange and collaboration experiences.

REFERENCES

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