

# INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT: NGOS/IGOS AND UNIVERSITIES LOOKING TO MAKE AN IMPACT BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter presents two case studies on university collaborations with international Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs): The first with Global Brigades, a student led service learning working in Nicaragua; and the second with the East African Community, headquartered in Arusha, Tanzania. The case is made that University partnerships with these types of organizations represent a promising new shape of strategic partnerships that serve the needs of students and in-country stakeholders alike. For the students that are involved in hands on*

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University Partnerships for International Development  
Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Volume 8, 77–91  
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ISSN: 2055-3641/doi:10.1108/S2055-36412016000008008

*international development work, applied experience is critical; for the NGOs/IGOs and the communities they serve, such partnerships with University can supply vital resources, labor, and powerful learning outcomes for the students. Finally, for the universities entering these types of partnerships, the benefit is providing opportunities for their students that are high impact and experiential and meaningful. The chapter concludes with the notion that these partnerships represent a successful strategy that blends practical and applied skillsets in the realm of international development, and encourages more partnerships of this type.*

**Keywords:** Study abroad; partnerships; liberal arts; assessments; global engagement; international collaboration

One of the often noted gaps in university curricula is the widespread absence of practical, global training in applied fields, particularly related to international development (Brustein, 2007; De Weert, 2011; Dvorak & Busteded, 2015). These gaps become even more apparent when colleges and universities wrestle with globalization efforts both on campus and off, and how they translate into the larger landscape of both the university mission and university core curriculum. In recent years, the focus of internationalization/globalization has centered on student movement, primarily by cultivating opportunities for U.S. college students to study abroad in both short-term and semester-long programs at foreign universities (Connell, 2015a, 2015b). Such opportunities are beneficial to the students' global perspectives and perhaps even in reinforcing the foundation for cultural empathy, but rarely do these moves toward globalization explore the value of applied skill sets needed for graduates to be effective practitioners in a globalized workforce.

As a result of the almost exclusive focus on the study abroad experience, initiatives which better marry global experiences with the sustained development of a student's practical skill set have not been a priority of globalization efforts. Service learning programs and short-term experiences, for example, have been deemed expensive, difficult to manage, hard to assess, and unclear as to whether or not the university curriculum benefits from such requirements. Many universities have created excellent programs that zero in on applied skill sets through creative partnerships and internships, and some have gained a degree of success, but sustaining these programs becomes challenging when the campus community might see such programs as extracurricular or as a service learning obligation which stands

academically isolated in the curricular requirements for graduation. In these conversations, questions inevitably result concerning the budgetary and developmental effectiveness of such programs in achieving the globalization goals of the university's mission, the broader student learning objectives, and the assessment of student outcomes following the experience (Altbach, 2007a, 2007b; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach & Peterson, 2007; Brustein, 2007; Tyron & Stoecker, 2008; Tyron et al., 2008). One innovative solution to this gap in which small liberal arts institutions on tight budgets might prevail lies in shifting the focus of study-abroad programs by developing strong relationships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs).

Partnership opportunities beyond universities are intriguing because of the aligned needs of both parties: Universities are increasingly under pressure to better prepare students with relevant workplace skills, and NGOs/IGOs need skilled human resources to carry out their work (Zusman, 2005). Such partnerships are also increasingly necessary because the scale of global human and environmental needs grows exponentially every year, producing job opportunities in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors for those with skilled experience.

For universities that aspire to prepare students for life in a global world and with the capacity to contribute to solutions to global problems, these partnerships are too significant to ignore. A 2013 survey of nonprofit organizations working both in domestic and international environments revealed that very few NGOs/ISOs intended to enact hiring freezes to reduce staff (13%) and many intended to expand (44%) (Nonprofit HR Solutions, 2013). In 2014, the nonprofit sector was called the "third largest US industry behind retail and manufacturing," and trends showed that the intentions of 2013 were met with increases in hiring reaching 30–50% in most sectors (International, Health, etc.) (Nonprofit HR Solutions, 2014). The demand for skilled job candidates remains an encouraging trend. It is also a call to colleges and universities to be more active in educating and training graduates to be effective global leaders.

Likewise, learning outcomes from globally based university mission statements increasingly align with the skill sets in the field of international development and are smart options which answer the call of relevance for schools steeped in the liberal arts tradition (Childress, 2009; Meacham & Gaff, 2006; Norris & Gillespie, 2009). Intellectual skills gained from the liberal arts such as critical thinking, creative problem solving and civility dovetail cleanly with the creativity and nimbleness necessary in NGO/IGO projects. In connecting traditional liberal arts student goals to international

development, relevant skills acquired during international experiences give universities an advantage in producing graduates who can effectively address this class of emerging problems. And considering the continuing employment trend mentioned above, these connections are needed as in no other time before.

In an environment of *potential* collaboration and cross-pollination of mission and learning goals between liberal arts universities and NGO/IGO organizations, one final benefit of such connections emerges in the comparison of costs with traditional study abroad programs. In the NGO/IGO context – and considering the cost of living in the countries of many NGO/IGO projects – spending a term abroad generates a fraction of the cost to both students and universities as compared to traditional study abroad locations. While a fee still exists to support the students studying in NGO settings, this fee typically covers nothing more than overhead, as opposed to study abroad fees which support overhead, faculty, additional programs, and administrative costs. Students also find the NGO/IGO experience less expensive because of several factors such as local cost of living and provisions made by the NGOs/IGOs. For the NGOs/IGOs themselves, the budgetary impact is longer term, emerging once the organizations begin seeing applicants better suited to and prepared for the skills which are necessary in running NGO/IGO projects. In the end, the benefit is manifold, for students, for liberal arts universities and for NGOs/IGOs, all of whom may be otherwise restricted by budgetary limits.

In the remainder of this chapter, we explore the pedagogical connections, benefits, and examples of these types of partnerships as they relate to efforts to incorporate varied programming in globalization efforts at small, liberal arts institutions. We make the argument that in addition to the usual array of study abroad programming and short-term faculty led field study, liberal arts institutions looking to globalize their campuses and their students could be aided by adding another band of programming that partners with NGOs. We will explore two examples – a university partnership with a US-based global service learning organization, Global Brigades; and the second, an IGO in East Africa, The East African Community – and address the curricular and budgetary value of these partnerships in the context of small liberal-arts college concerns. While the approach in this chapter is by no means exhaustive in discussing the many issues and concerns which are part of the integration of NGO/IGO programs, we hope to provide a framework which could serve as a foundation for conversations on liberal arts campuses across the United States. In the end, these partnerships can create significant linkages between curriculum, the pedagogies of

global education, and the relationships with high-impact, NGO and IGO-based experiential field experiences for students. The included examples illustrate the opportunities of such programs and provide both a scope of experience which speaks to the effectiveness of the model in practice and a guide to establishing the programs and discovering the programs' effectiveness in achieving the goals of the globalized curriculum.

## **LINKAGES OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LIBERAL ARTS CURRICULA**

As global and societal needs evolve, international development and higher education are becoming increasingly interwoven, and for the last 10 years, NGOs/IGOs and universities have been looking more closely at each other for guidance toward influencing both education, skill enhancement, and cultural empathy in areas of human development.

Indeed, there is a logical alignment of goals and desires between the growing necessity to address both the direction and capabilities of social and environmental constituencies and the ability of universities to educate and train capable graduates to meet the needs of concerned institutions (Brustein, 2007). The increasingly globalized world sees deepening pressures on fixed resources, coupled with the emerging job market in the development sector, compounded again by private-sector institutions demanding global perspectives and experience foster the need for collaboration between development efforts and education. The difficult question in these conceptual linkages between the sectors, however, is how to create programs and learning opportunities for students, who will ultimately enter the workforce and decision makers contributing to global change and human development.

In order to confidently embrace this movement toward partnership and collaboration, institutions on both sides of this collaborative practice must develop a clear and coordinated understanding concerning several key elements:

1. *Desired Learning Outcomes* must be reachable in the student liberal arts experience, and must also speak to the needs of the field;
2. *Experiential Learning* must become part of the curricular experience of the students in college. During the learning experience, supporting non-university organizations must understand and support the academic

- nature of the student experience and its outcomes and be willing to work with the students in order to develop skills in the field;
3. *Student Assessment* must be embedded in course content and co-curricular experiences and must be collaborative between university faculty and partner administrators (Forum on Education Abroad, 2015).

These practices serve as a bridge between curricular and practical needs, on the one hand helping to maintain the integrity of the partnership, and on the other, building the understanding to move the partnership forward with shared vision and desired outcomes. In this way, the partnership between liberal arts institutions and development organizations becomes a strategy to meet the needs of each.

As an examination of these practices reveals, higher education has always been inseparably linked with international development. The prevalence of university mission statements that assert to prepare students for life in a globalized world suggests that cultural understanding and empathy have gained the attention of higher education for quite some time (Dvorak & Busted, 2015). More than that, colleges and universities have begun to claim to prepare their graduates to encounter the world and its cultures not just through textbooks, but also through experience and first-hand knowledge. This specific experience also implies an awareness of inequalities and disparities between the “haves” and “have nots” of the world (whether domestic or international). Such outcomes have always been part of an unwritten expectation for graduates, even since the resurgence of study abroad in the 1960s (Hoffa, 2007; Hoffa & DePaul, 2010); it is, however, significant that university mission statements have only recently begun to incorporate such verbiage specifically, and with such prominence.

As a field, international development focuses on sustainable human development, including healthcare, education, human rights, capacity development, and environmental stewardship. Amartya Sen expresses what has become the basic goal: “Human development, as an approach is concerned with the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it” (Shaikh, 2004). And Mabub ul Haq adds that “The basic purpose of development is to enlarge people’s choices. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives” (Ul Haq, 1995). The plethora of organizations, businesses, and government offices which devote themselves to some facet of international development, either as a direct mission of the organization or as a tangential aspect of their operations (such as the

extractive industries that contribute to development initiatives in developing countries or even more recent moves toward fiscal corporate responsibility) has become a dominant feature of the globalized world which all graduates need to navigate. More ambitious than merely impacting skills of cultural empathy, a world has emerged which increasingly demands that such understanding of human development be coupled with the knowledge and skills which enable students to positively contribute to the betterment of the world. This connective need spans all aspects of international development.

The relation between liberal arts institutions and the field of international development has historically been closely connected through the fundamental calling of higher education to educate and empower college graduates to meet societal needs. For example, religious institutions of higher education have long acted on this element of internationalization embedded in their core missions, many requiring mission-based fieldwork that moves to improve social conditions while at the same time spreading a doctrine of faith. Also John Dewey, one of the early champions of experiential and applied learning, emphasized the relationship between experience and education, extending a humanist tradition which placed education in the service of the public good (Dewey, 1938). As calls for internationalization increase across the United States, much of the underlying justification for generating an awareness of human development comes from a need to prepare students for an increasing globalized and competitive employment landscape. The need for area knowledge in strategic locations around the world, fluency in foreign languages, and technical knowledge of strategic industries, have all played a role in propelling common calls for internationalized campus.

The environment of higher education, however, has shifted in the last decade to a state which offers potentials for new and dynamic connections with partners. For many years, the value proposition contained in service learning for liberal arts institutions had been increasingly under threat for the perceived irrelevance of the general core curriculum for a society preoccupied with job skills. More recently, the cost of higher education has added pressure from those paying for college to have it lead to employment as quickly as possible. As a result, no longer are professional programs housed in community colleges and separate, independent schools; numbers of university “Professional Schools” have increased dramatically in the last 10 years, focusing primarily on STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). The increase in program numbers directly corresponds to the increase in student enrollment (Barron’s College Division Staff, 1995–2015).

The disconnect in perception between the general liberal arts curriculum and the acquisition of professional competencies is that the professional

skills which are most in demand, and those which offer the best flexibility in terms of a dynamic employment landscape, are critical thinking and creative problem solving. As many involved in curriculum development at liberal arts colleges understand, these two skills are always the core of pedagogical practice. The liberal arts curriculum approaches these skills traditionally holistically and “equips future employees with the ability to engage in thoughtful, meaningful, and engaged dialogue” which can acknowledge and grapple with the appreciation of difference and implementation of humanitarian values as they are expressed in the goals and objectives of global education (Lowry, 2014). Traditionally, however, professional programs have encouraged critical thinking and problem solving only within practical experience, not in broader, more transferrable ways.

Significantly, the employer demand and curricular focus for the versatile critical thinking and creative problem solving skills of liberal arts education correspond in interesting ways with the broad conception of the curricular goals of global education:

1. Competence in perceiving oneself in a global society (*critical thinking*);
2. Competence in making decisions with clear perception of consequences (*critical thinking, creative problem solving*);
3. Competence in reaching judgments supported by analysis and empathy (*critical thinking, creative problem solving*);
4. Competence in exercising influence through effective and responsible participating in community activities (*creative problem solving*) (Becker, 1982).

In this sense, global experiences as they exist in the values and objectives of liberal arts institutions become a dynamic connection point for all aspects of professional skill development. When considering such linkages, it becomes clear how the traditional liberal arts curricular focus on critical awareness, citizenship, and empathy dovetails comfortably with both the emphasis on community and service of nonprofit type NGOs/IGOs and the marketable and competitive skills which are increasingly in demand.

### **EXAMPLES: NGOs AND IGOs**

We now turn to two examples which illustrate the potential and power of partnerships between small liberal arts universities and NGOs to educate and train students in the fields of international studies and development. Although each example provides a different context and relationship

between universities and NGOs/IGOs, both may serve as ways in which to think about cost-effective, low-risk programs which support student engagement in international settings.

### *Global Brigades*

Global Brigades, Inc. (USA) was founded in 2007 as a California-based not-for-profit organization and achieved US 501c3 status in 2008 (Global Brigades, 2016). Currently, Global Brigades USA mobilizes more than 7,000 annual volunteers through over 450 university-based chapters. As one of the largest student-led global health and sustainable development organization in the United States, Global Brigades has mobilized thousands of university students and professionals through nine skill-based programs that work in partnership with community members to improve quality of life in under resourced regions while respecting local culture (Global Brigades, 2016). The experience of Global Brigades in service to under-resourced global communities is both immersive and complex, but more than anything else, the experience for volunteers is educational.

In order to provide an enriched, academic experience for Global Brigades volunteers, Arcadia University and Global Brigades partnered to offer a three-credit academic component for Global brigades volunteers. The mission of Global Brigades is to improve quality of life in developing communities and to empower volunteers and under-resourced communities to resolve global health and economic disparities (Global Brigades, 2016). While the Global Brigades mission echoes the service-learning directives of universities, it likewise focuses on the practical, professional skills which other NGOs/IGOs put forth (Global Brigades, 2016). Arcadia's stated mission, conversely, focuses on the critical thinking and problem solving skills of liberal arts pedagogies: To provide a distinctively global, integrative, and personal learning experience for intellectually curious students in preparation for a life of scholarship, service, and professional contribution (Arcadia Mission Statement, 2014). These supportive connections between context and conceptual approach embedded in such missions open the door for applied partnerships with service and policy-oriented NGOs.

Created in 2013, Arcadia University's International Development Field Study course marries the missions of both institutions and builds a supportive framework for the acquisition of skills and supportive conceptual processes. The course allows volunteers to connect with fellow volunteers before their in-country experience; explores the issues concerning the

implications and impact of their service; and provides an opportunity for guided, academic reflection to support the development of critical thinking about their service-learning experience.

GB381: International Development Field Study focuses on global health and economic inequality and the role of volunteers as change agents in this context. The 3-credit undergraduate course explores development discourse and focuses on using theory and practice in negotiating and interrogating the experience of volunteering as an instance of social change in under resourced communities. The course is grounded in applied reflection and interdisciplinary social analysis of volunteer and community mobilization efforts in resolving global health and economic disparities, and helps the students to frame their thoughts and experiences in the ethics of discourse. Volunteer activities (from fundraising to return from being part of a Brigade) are treated as instances of global service experiences with potential to provide multiple opportunities for learning and analysis.

The course and the final paper assignment address two primary questions:

- (1) What are the theoretical and practical grounds for global service (e.g., holistic development, capacity building, human rights based approach, sustainability) and how might those grounds compete with or be challenged by other perspectives and practical considerations?
- (2) What sort of health and development issues, problems, conflicts, “dilemmas” arise in the context of the practice of volunteering as a contribution to global social change and in making these efforts sustainable (e.g., universal human rights vs. respect for other cultures), how are such conflicts to be comprehended theoretically, and how are such conflicts to be resolved in applied practice?

At the end of the course, students have engaged in and developed the capacity for:

- Knowing how holistic models of development are designed and applied to build sustainable capacity in rural under resourced communities;
- Practicing personal reflection and self-correction as part of their continued learning and professional development;
- Recognizing the extent to which social structures and culture may oppress, marginalize, alienate, or create or enhance privilege and power;
- Gaining sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups;
- Using a research project to engage in an academic activity that promotes global health and economic equity.

GB381: International Development Field Study runs for six weeks before the Global Brigades experience, with one concluding week when the final assignments of the course are due following the return home.

From a budgetary perspective, both for the base university and the students participating in the program, the partnership brings credits to the university at a low cost for delivery, and the students receive additional credits which accumulate benefits for the student's academic record. Global Brigades gets a value-added aspect to the volunteer experience by having the stamp of academic approval on their operations, which carries the very real benefit of helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as engaging in an educational process that yields more reflective practitioners in the field of international development.

The partnership between Arcadia University and Global Brigades illustrates a creative, low cost option for small colleges and universities to extend their reach to students in an international and applied setting. A model that is integrated into a traditional course structure, the partnership blends hands-on, applied learning with the theoretical framing required to put the experience in a larger, more reflective context. This is a case whereby everybody wins, though with the very real caveat that it must be maintained properly in terms of monitoring, risk management, and constant assessment.

### *East African Community in Arusha, Tanzania*

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organization (IGO) of the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. Established in 1999, the mission of the organization is to integrate the economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions of the member states as a means of improving the quality of life of the people of East Africa through increased competitiveness, production, trade, and investments.

As part of Arcadia University's overall effort to incorporate internationalization and project-based learning throughout the curriculum, Arcadia established the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Arusha, Tanzania in partnership with the East African Community (East African Community, NCPR, 2014b). The initiative was an effort to provide students and faculty at Arcadia, as well as scholarship students in each of the member states, a structured environment to work collaboratively on realizing the EAC mission. The goals of the Center were complementary with the vision and overall mission of the EAC, principally, in its charge to

promote peace and security as a means to further regional integration and development (East African Community, NCPR, 2014b). The Center served as an onsite resource facility for regional integration issues in the areas of capacity building, including the enhancement of joint operations and patrols, the development and exchange of training programs for security personnel, research on common protocols for the management of refugees, and development of appropriate mechanisms for conflict management and resolution practices. A primary function of the Center focused on facilitating and enhancing the overall capacity to reach the goal of EAC integration and effective common protocols between member states (East African Community, NCPR, 2014b).

The Center gave students a significant and meaningful experiences in applied research and data collection as well as cultural emersion in the politics of a regional East African authority that supported the EAC's objectives, for students and faculty alike (East African Community, 2014a). Significantly to all of the initiative's stakeholders, all research and policy projects emerged from EAC mission and need, thereby encouraging the collaborative process in sustainable ways. Specifically, students worked to provide research support services for EAC Defense Liaison and Legal Guidelines departments and establish a database on conflict management and resolution processes and worked to establish a conflict management and regional policy research library All projects were collaboratively designed to move the EAC's agenda forward. Likewise, the objectives of the project for the students and faculty provided hands-on experience with program design, implementation, and assessment.

Because of the mix of US students studying abroad, faculty with interests in East Africa, EAC professional staff and African students from the EAC member states, the project effectively realized the more esoteric student development goals of a liberal arts tradition and married it to real-world application. In each collaborative project of the EAC, students approach the real-world problems of international policy through the guidance and support of local legislators and US faculty who support the students' developing liberal-arts based skills in research, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. In the end, US students passing through the program emerge with a set of experiences and applied skills that serve them well beyond the specifics of what they did in East Africa.

As with the previous example for Global Brigades, the relative cost to both the university and the participating students are far less significant compared to more traditional semester study abroad options served up by large independent study abroad providers (Pappano, 2007). In the case of

the partnership with the EAC, university credit was structured around hands-on policy work relevant to East Africa coordinated by EAC staff and University faculty. Additionally, a small stipend to the EAC was created as a way to incentivize participation of students in meaningful projects.

## CONCLUSION

Higher education in general and liberal arts institutions in particular are under increasing pressure to defend their relevance in an outcome-based world. At the same time, these institutions are facing significant financial constraints and an incredibly competitive higher education landscape. Even as needs increase for students to possess the hallmark critical and adaptive social and intellectual skills of liberal arts institutions, the need for creative and meaningful partnerships to achieve these goals has never been greater.

This chapter illustrates the successful blending of practical and applied skillsets with liberal arts values of critical thinking. Through creative partnerships with NGOs and IGOs, liberal arts institutions can extend their reach in a way that is commensurate with their values. Indeed, partnerships such as these not only meet the pressures of demands for relevance in the employment market post-graduation, but significantly contribute to the higher calling of the liberal arts, preparing students for a full and productive life, not just entry level workforce skills.

Of course, all of these suggestions concerning developing new types of programs must be placed against the critical, wider backdrop of health and safety, effective monitoring both on-site and on campus, and assessment. These types of creative partnerships increasingly provide a cost-effective, and more importantly, relevant and meaningful experiences for the students. And something else equally important is available as well: the opportunity for liberal arts institutions to assert their identity and value toward making this a better world.

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