

# BUILDING INTERCOLLEGIATE PARTNERSHIPS



**S**everal years ago, **Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pa.,** wanted to launch a global outreach and study abroad program in Indonesia. The school was interested in the country for several reasons: Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, its constitution allows for religious pluralism, and it's a well-run democracy. The trouble: Lehigh did not have scholars with expertise in Indonesia. The solution: The school reached out to professors with global interests—and the willingness to partner with other U.S. schools in outreach to Indonesia.

Jack Lule, professor and chair of the Journalism and Communication Department at Lehigh, was one of those professors. An experienced world traveler, he was intrigued by Indonesia, a place he had never been. “I had no local knowledge or expertise,” Lule says. “But I knew there were U.S. scholars who did.”

That's when Lule and other Lehigh faculty and staff decided to enlist the help of the University of Michigan and its renowned Center for Southeast Asian Studies. “It was a complementary relationship,” says Lule. “We could take care of the logistics, and the folks in Michigan helped with the Indonesian context.”

In 2011, the two American universities and the Universitas Gadjah Mada in Indonesia partnered to create the United States Indonesia Partnership Program (USIPP). During the five-week summer program, guided by faculty and staff from all three institutions, American and Indonesian students lived and traveled in each other's countries as a cohort studying religion, democratic society and pluralism.

TEAMING WITH OTHER  
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ON CO-LED STUDY  
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CAN STRENGTHEN  
THE EXPERIENCE.



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# BENEFITS TO STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

Many colleges have rich study abroad programs where they team with an international university. Creating a co-led program with another U.S. university may enhance the experience for students.

All of the students in the USIPP traveled together to the Indonesian island of Java, Lehigh University and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, plus Detroit, Baltimore, Washington and New York. The multi-location program facilitates deeper understanding of religious diversity in global democratic societies. For many of the U.S. students, this was their first time in a different region of the country. “The change of locale and the constant exchange of ideas is invaluable,” says Lule.

Creating a co-led study abroad program also benefits the schools. “One of the great things about working with other colleges is bringing together the strengths of two universities,” says Lule. “We can’t all excel at everything.”

There’s an added financial advantage, too. “Having both universities carry some of the cost makes sense,” says Lule. “So you’re not only splitting the intellectual weight of the program; you’re also splitting the economic weight.”



## TIPS FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Organizing a study abroad program with another U.S. university is not without challenges. Lule recalls one of the first hiccups in the USIPP, which came early in the planning stages. “We were envisioning this program as a life-changing experience for young undergraduates,” remembers Lule. “Michigan wanted to bring its Ph.D. students for research purposes, and they had so much more expertise than undergraduates.” After some discussion, the schools agreed the program should focus on undergraduate students. But it drove home the importance of solid communication between participants.

“The communication stream is the most important thing to nail down when you’re starting a program like this,” says Stacy Burger, interim director of International Services at Lehigh. She has helped organize the USIPP since its inception and has served as a travel leader on the trip several times. She and Lule offer several pointers to universities that are interested in developing a co-led study abroad program with another U.S. school:

- **Approach people you know.** Last year, Towson University in Baltimore joined the USIPP when organizers at Lehigh realized the program would benefit from a university partner closer to the nation’s capital. A professor from Lehigh reached out to a former student—now a political science professor at Towson—who jumped at the chance to participate. “Strong relationships build these types of programs,” says Burger.
- **Find a faculty champion.** “It can’t go forward as a really good idea from administration, trustees or industry,” says Lule. “If you don’t have faculty members who are willing and able to put in the time, it will be a non-starter.”
- **Pick a project manager.** Since its inception, the USIPP has grown to five universities—two in the U.S. and three in Indonesia. (The University of Michigan opted out of the program after last summer.) Arranging a program and logistics in two countries for 12 students from four universities, plus travel leaders requires careful planning. “Having one main person be the collector of information is essential,” says Burger. She maintains a master plan for the five-week program in addition to an annual planning timeline for the program.
- **Select a program leader at each university.** “If you don’t have one main point of contact at each school, then you will get bounced around a lot when you have questions,” says Burger.
- **Maintain your self-interests.** “It sounds strange, but each faculty member should think selfishly,” says

Lule. “The reason these kinds of programs will work is because they benefit your institution, your students and you as a scholar. If the program is just being done because it’s a nice idea, I’m not sure how you sustain it.”

- **Hold one another accountable.** Another college in the mid-Atlantic was part of the USIPP for one summer. But 10 days prior to the program beginning, Burger discovered that a major component the college was supposed to plan had not been lined up. Lehigh scrambled to schedule programming. “You need to ensure your partner institutions are on the ball,” says Burger. “Without stepping on toes, you need to maintain consistency and commitment to your master plan.”

The experience Lule gained working in the USIPP, from which he has since stepped aside, encouraged him to pursue other partnerships. He is currently cooperating with Lafayette College and Muhlenberg College—two other schools in Pennsylvania’s Lehigh Valley—to develop an interconsortial minor in documentary studies.

Creating a co-led study abroad program is certainly a lot of work. But Burger encourages others to give it a try.

“Take the risk,” she says. “It’s totally worth it!”



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