

FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS



This summer, 14 undergraduate students from Brandeis University are participating in a five-week program in Siena, Italy, combining studio art and art history. The program, which began this year, is a collaborative exchange between the university and the Siena Art Institute. A faculty member from Brandeis is teaching studio art, while a professor from the art institute is teaching art history. Next summer, the schools will switch courses, so a Brandeis professor will teach art history and someone from the Siena Art Institute will lead the studio art class.

“It’s a great model,” says J. Scott Van Der Meid, Assistant Dean of Study Abroad at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass. “We’re not just taking our faculty to Italy and renting space. We’re collaborating with the Siena Art Institute to run the program together.”

The Brandeis in Siena program is one of five study abroad programs offered by the university that are either faculty led or have Brandeis faculty oversight. The school is currently developing two more. Developing and maintaining international partnerships to facilitate these programs requires planning, time and vision. But in this era of international education, fostering relationships with global partners is critical. “In the global world we live in, it’s important to provide opportunities for our students to interact with different cultures and people,” says Van Der Meid. “Strong relationships with international partners are what allow us to move forward.”

THE KEY
TO A STRONG GLOBAL
EDUCATION PROGRAM IS
FINDING AND
MAINTAINING
THE RIGHT PARTNERS.



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BUILDING A BOND TAKES TIME

Three years ago, California State University San Marcos had three faculty-led study abroad programs and eight exchange programs. Now it has 12 faculty-led and 26 exchange programs. “We have a strong curricula here at the university, but our partnerships allow us to offer additional course offerings that students are unable to get here,” says Robert Carolin, Associate Dean for Global Programs and Services at Cal State San Marcos.



The surge in international partnerships is the result of an organized effort that included a comprehensive survey of the university’s academic and non-academic departments to ascertain who was involved in international work. “It’s much easier to develop partnerships if you know where your strengths are as an institution,” says Carolin. For example, if a handful of faculty members in the biology department conduct research in Argentina every year, then that presents an opportunity to partner with an institution in that country.

“Through our efforts, the deans and provosts gained a better handle on what our faculty are doing, and we identified five strategic geographic areas we want to focus on,” says Carolin. Those areas are Latin America, southeast Asia, Scandinavia, Africa and east Asia. Conducting the survey was no easy task, however. It took about a year-and-a-half to compile information from faculty. But the laborious task is starting to lead to interesting collaborations, including a recent one with a university in southern Brazil.

Cal State San Marcos is teaming with the South American university to create a program related to the economics of music and the music industry. Students in the economics department at Cal State San Marcos go to Brazil to take music courses, while music students from the Brazilian university take economics classes at Cal State San Marcos. “The music and economics departments on our campus are relatively small, yet they’ve found this niche and have become very international,” says Carolin.

5 Types of International Academic Partnerships

In its Global Partnership Toolkit, the Institute of International Education sites five academic partnership models. There are pros and cons to each type, so universities must carefully consider their capabilities and goals when selecting a model.

- 1. Collaborative teaching**—Technology solutions allow international partners to team teach through virtual classrooms, videoconferences and web-based platforms.
- 2. Consortia**—A group of two or more institutions can work together and pool resources to take advantage of each university’s strengths and benefit students.
- 3. Faculty exchange**—Guest faculty can teach entire classes or components of a course. This model can be a great segue into deeper partnerships.
- 4. Faculty-led study abroad programs**—There are a wide range of faculty-led programs, but one of the greatest benefits is they eliminate issues surrounding credit transfer.
- 5. International dual degree programs**—These programs are offered collaboratively by two higher education institutions in different countries and often feature jointly developed, integrated curriculum.



FIVE TIPS FOR DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS



When pursuing international relationships, consider this advice:

- **Review existing affiliations**—You may conduct a formal survey or have informal conversations with faculty. Brandeis forged a relationship with the Siena Art Institute in part because of several ties to the area: Numerous students including a university art historian’s daughter had studied at the art institute. In addition, two faculty members had done their post-doctorate research in Siena, Italy. “There were more than two or three connections that made us think this would be a positive experience,” says Van Der Meid.
- **Gauge student interest**—This, too, could be done through surveys, focus groups or conversations. “We have some wonderful ideas from faculty with interesting potential partners, but no ability to recruit students because they may not be interested in that particular esoteric topic,” says Van Der Meid. “You need to combine student interest with the university’s academic and social goals and consider what the market will bear.”
- **Talk to faculty about educational opportunities**—This fall, Carolin is planning a “road show” with all of the academic departments at Cal State San Marcos. He will gather their areas of interest and create a needs assessment for international partnerships. Then the Global Affairs Committee, which comprises student and faculty representatives from each college within the institution, will compare the information with its priorities and consider potential partnerships.
- **Capitalize on current partnerships**—Carolin stresses to faculty the importance of deepening relationships with international partners. “If a faculty member says they’re traveling to England, I ask them to visit X or Y university where we already have a relationship rather than develop new partnerships with institutions that may or may not be a good fit,” he says. “This often reignites the faculty member’s enthusiasm, provides a better understanding of curricula being offered at our partner institution and presents opportunities for them to teach overseas on a sabbatical or spring break.”
- **Make sure there’s long-term interest**—Fostering international relationships takes time and resources, so it needs to make sense from a long-term institutional viewpoint. “Even if current students are excited by a program, we’re looking to see if future students would also partake in it,” says Van Der Meid. “It has to be a good, sustainable match: We don’t have time to do one-offs.” Brandeis has entered into consortiums with third-party providers to offer more than 350 study abroad options to students with particular needs that aren’t met by the university’s program.

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Van Der Meid cautions that starting an international partnership isn't the hard part. "You need to put equal energy into maintaining the relationships because hiccups are bound to occur," he says. "Have patience. As in any relationship, there will be misinterpretations." But in the end, the work is worth it because dynamic international relationships lead to great experiences for students and position universities as leaders in global education.



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