

CREATING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS



If you're looking for an exemplar for partnerships among

international universities, a great place to start is the Illinois-Sweden Program for Educational and Research Exchange (INSPIRE). The transnational alliance between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) and three leading research universities in Stockholm rests on three foundational pillars—education, research and service.

Nearly two-thirds of the 14 colleges at Illinois are involved in the multifaceted alliance, and approximately 170 students have participated in various programs in Stockholm during the past several years. Illinois initially invested about \$325,000 in INSPIRE. Since then, the program has yielded more than \$20 million in external funding from U.S. sources.



**ESTABLISHING
STRATEGIC
INTERNATIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS
REQUIRES EXPERTISE
AND PLANNING.**

“The partnership is the poster child for us on building strategic international relationships,” says Tim Barnes, Director of Illinois Strategic International Partnerships. He oversees alliances with approximately 300 international partners, of which about 80 percent are universities.

The number and complexity of international partnerships has grown in recent years. “The types of partnership agreements now far exceed the traditional student-to-student exchange model to include faculty exchange, faculty development opportunities, collaborative research, and joint and dual degree offerings,” says Heather Ward, Associate Director for the Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement at the American Council on Education (ACE).



TERRADOTTA



"THE TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS NOW FAR EXCEED THE TRADITIONAL STUDENT-TO-STUDENT EXCHANGE MODEL . . ."

In ACE's 2017 "**Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses**" study, nearly half of the institutions that responded have begun to develop or expand international partnerships in the last three years. More than 40 percent have articulated a formal strategy for international partnerships.

While the reasons for establishing formal partnerships with international universities vary, the big picture goals are often similar. Barnes cites a former Illinois provost, who said partnerships are about visibility, impact and excellence. "He looked for relationships that would increase the university's visibility in terms of educational and research offerings, impact the ability of our faculty to do cutting-edge research on big science questions that are transnational and leverage our strengths for greater excellence," says Barnes.



TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

The University of Arizona has about 250 institutional partnerships around the world, with university-to-university ones accounting for approximately 200 of those. "We are an R1 land grant institution, so the majority of our agreements are focused on research, faculty collaboration or different types of student mobility programs," says Dale LaFleur, Director of Institutional Relations in the Office of Global Initiatives at the University of Arizona.

When faculty approach LaFleur to develop an international partnership she starts with an informal conversation to discover what the faculty member plans to do, what opportunities they see in the relationship and how they would like to proceed. "There's a certain point where I suggest to the faculty that we start formalizing conversations with the partner institution," says LaFleur. "Usually that point comes when something concrete is going to happen, such as pursuing a research project or setting up a student mobility program."

Once universities opt to formalize a relationship, agreements generally fall under two main categories:

Agreements of Intentionality—These are called many names, including letters of intent (LOI), memorandum of understanding (MOU) and cooperation agreements. They are typically non-binding and lay out the general goals and scope of the partnership. They lack specificity about tasks, deliverables, funding, etc.

Agreements of Implementation—These legally binding contracts provide specifics on the rights, obligations, quotas, deadlines and so forth of each partner in the relationship. Examples of agreements of implementation are collaborative research agreements and student exchange agreements.



TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS

If you're considering international partnerships with educational institutions, consider the following advice:

Understand the partnership landscape—"Before you start working on your portfolio, you've got to collect information and understand where your university currently stands," says Barnes. He spent his first few years at the University of Illinois reviewing all the historical agreements and talking to faculty about which ones have lasted and why.

Hire a dedicated staff person—"Along with the growth in volume and complexity of partnerships has come the need to support that with a professional role," says Ward. About 30 percent of the respondents in ACE's Mapping study indicated that they employ a staff member whose primary responsibility is developing and managing international partnerships.

Keep your campus in the know—"My biggest piece of advice is to actively communicate with your faculty and researchers on campus," says LaFleur. Make sure they know about existing partnerships and how to work with you to expand them or add new ones. Barnes creates an annual presentation on the University of Illinois' partnership portfolio that he shares with departments, deans, provosts and other stakeholders. He also maintains detailed information in a self-created database so he can let an environmental engineering professor know where Illinois has partnerships related to clean water projects, for example.



Involve the faculty—"To make these relationships truly faculty-driven, you've got to establish an international advisory committee across your campus to provide an effective way for faculty to come forward and contribute to your goals," says Barnes. Participants will vary depending on your institution, but they should include several faculty members who are international champions, such as those who lead study abroad programs.

Look for mutually beneficial partnerships—"Both institutions need to get value from the arrangement," says Ward. "How you measure that value can be different, but you need to articulate it so that everyone is clear on the expectations." If your sole reason for the alliance is to attract students from the partner country who will pay full tuition at your university, for example, then it's not a reciprocal relationship.

Tie your goals to larger institutional ones—"To be strategic about your partnerships, you must have some overall internationalization plan and it should tie into even broader institutional goals," says Barnes. For example, if your university strives to be a leader in developing aerospace engineers for regional aircraft, then your international partnerships should focus on that as well.

Build multidimensional relationships—Focus on a handful of universities with which you can create strategic partnerships. For instance, the University of Arizona and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico have



been partners since 1980. Together, they have pursued multiple academic and research projects, including dual degrees in engineering and a binational consortium to research arid-lands issues facing the southwest and Mexico. The consortium is supported by funding from Mexico's National Council for Science and Technology, also known as CONACyT. In the last two years, dedicated offices were established on each university's campuses.

Allow for new opportunities to bubble up—While it's important to have a partnership strategy—and to invest time and resources in managing partnerships that have proven successful—there should still be room for new relationships to form. “You don't want to squelch faculty members' enthusiasm for making international connections,” says Ward.



More on International Partnerships

The American Council on Education offers a free four-part series entitled “**Internationalization in Action: International Partnerships.**” It examines the nature and practice of international partnerships, as well as the planning and support required for their success. The series covers:

- Definitions and Dimensions
- Strategic Planning
- Institutional Support Structures
- Individual Partnerships

The first two parts, “Definitions and Dimensions” and “Strategic Planning,” are currently available. The remaining two will be available soon.

“Collaborative international relationships are multipliers,” concludes Barnes. “They multiply the impact of individual faculty members—even within their home institutions—to think more broadly about how to work with other people. Partnerships build bridges on campus as well as worldwide.”



TERRADOTTA

ABOUT TERRA DOTTA

Our mission at Terra Dotta is to offer the very best products and services in higher education software. We are committed to delivering a user-experience that transforms the way our clients operate and engage with their constituents. We accomplish this through the continual deployment of best-in-class technology, and the focus we place on mutual trust in each and every one of our business relationships. These values form the Terra Dotta difference. For additional information please visit www.terradotta.com