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Approaches and Challenges to Internationalizing Scholarship

A case study from Texas Tech University: What strategies worked and what challenges remain.



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By [Gad Perry](#), [Sukant Misra, PhD](#), [Reagan Ribordy](#), [David Weindorf](#) | July 1, 2019

From Addis Ababa to Zimbabwe and from art to zoology, at Texas Tech University (TTU), our faculty and graduate students conduct studies around the globe on a range of topics. This is a reflection of a multiyear undertaking to include scholarship in comprehensive campus internationalization activities.

Leading the effort is the Office of International Affairs, whose International Research and Development Division (IRDD) was established in 2014, with institutional support and funding, to augment more

traditional and primarily intranational services. IRDD was conceived to offer dedicated and specialized support, collaboratively with the Office of Research and Innovation, to the university community for international research and development initiatives.

Effective Strategies

Much of our approach had to be developed with relatively little to model it after. We are sharing highlights from the process in the hope that others can learn from our experiences, avoid our mistakes, and help address some of the remaining challenges.

1. Keep in mind that institutionally internationalizing scholarship is an ongoing process, not a one-time action.

Relationships and reputations are not built overnight. Although some actions have had rapid, positive outcomes, many others have taken months—if not years. Some initiatives may take decades to bear fruit.

2. Provide services, not decrees.

We found that offering assistance is a better stimulus for intelligent, self-motivated professionals such as faculty. Removing administrative tasks and bureaucratic impediments allows academics to focus on their scholarship.

We provide proposal development services and ensure that all guidelines are met, and specialists identify domestic and international collaborators, establish international agreements, and navigate export control regulations.

3. Present information about services and funding opportunities.

Our grant administration professionals track and disseminate information about international opportunities through monthly funding alerts and make presentations across campus.

4. Help multidisciplinary teams.

IRDD brings together faculty with similar research interests to create multidisciplinary teams. Familiarity with other work taking place across campus, as well as personal relationships built on trust, fosters collaboration. Establishing a network of off-campus associations is also beneficial.

5. Offer seed grants.

Individual faculty members, especially at the start of their career, are under tremendous pressure to quickly show success. Establishing international relationships takes time and resources, so we offer three types of international seed grant programs: one specific to Brazil, one for initiatives with any country, and an international travel grant.

The scope of grants that might result—typically larger for the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines—is not considered a factor. Relatively modest investments have yielded good return, usually more than 10:1.

6. Invest in international outreach.

This strategy is difficult to formalize or assess, yet it is crucial. We prioritize countries and strategic disciplinary areas, emerging opportunities, and existing relationships. The process may be imperfect and take longer than desired, if only because of geopolitical changes and shifts in priorities and on-campus expertise.

Outcomes and Challenges

Since its inception, IRDD has assisted faculty in submitting 130 proposals, totaling more than \$64 million. Of these, \$5,366,496 in funding has been awarded—an 8.8 percent success rate, which is noteworthy in today’s highly competitive environment. Many new faculty members, who grew up in a more global academic and public culture, have been eager to engage internationally.

However, the process of internationalizing has not come without its challenges, which include:

Institutional policies and procedures.

Policies and practices that promote internationalization involve complex, institutionwide decisions. Our approach has been to create a culture of awareness, driven by success rather than mandate. In 2018, our efforts and accomplishments were recognized by NAFSA with the Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization, but we are not finished. Perhaps the biggest gap at TTU is a common one: international engagement is not explicitly acknowledged or adequately rewarded in tenure codes.

International ethics.

In some arenas, appropriate research behaviors are mandated by entities such as the Institutional Review Board (IRB). However, we have been unable to locate recommendations on some issues unique to international settings. For example, should the university have a policy that requires coauthorship with colleagues from the country in which an international study was conducted? What about profit sharing when a discovery that can be commercialized is made in a country that does not have laws governing it?

Safety and security.

Study abroad programs have clearly defined safety protocols. Little of that exists for academics traveling for research purposes. TTU provides faculty going abroad with health insurance and, upon request, security information, but rarely interferes in the faculty members’ choice of where to travel and when.

Graduate education.

By far, most study abroad programs focus on undergraduates. Yet, arguably, the exposure of graduate students to international settings at a level appropriate to their professional stage is even more pivotal to the lifetime success of students in many disciplines. How do we improve on this dynamic?

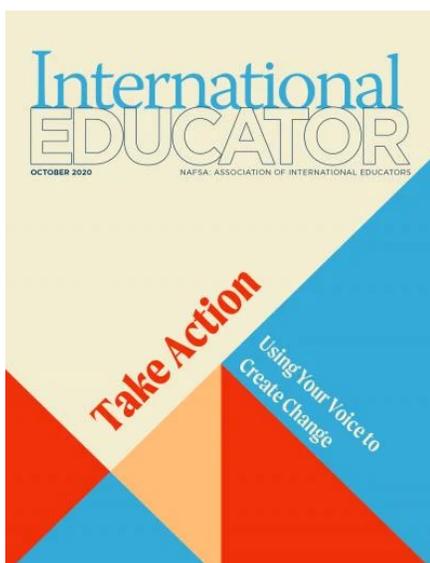
Room for More Exploration

Much attention has been devoted to expanding the role of curricular and cocurricular internationalization and researching the advantages and challenges, but internationalizing scholarship has gone relatively unexamined. Our experience with internationalizing Texas Tech University's research efforts suggests that institutional support and policies can encourage and aid faculty in establishing and broadening their global scholarship focus.

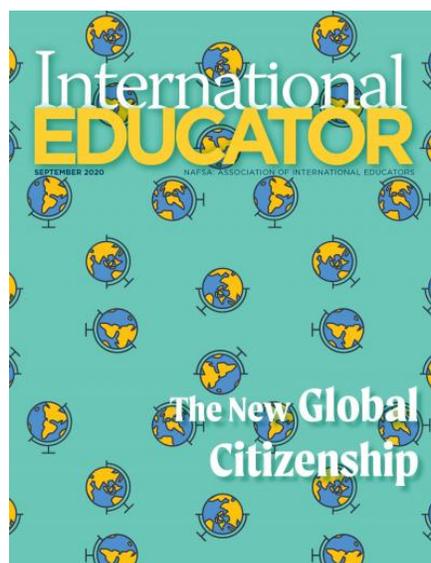
Some activities we have tried have been better at achieving this goal than others, but we are sure that other tactics exist that would enhance the effort or perhaps work even better than those we have developed. There is much room for the exploration of institutional approaches, analyses of the benefits, and the identification and overcoming of remaining and emerging challenges.

Topics: [Comprehensive Internationalization](#)

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