
DETC OCCASIONAL PAPER

21

**Global
Activities
of DETC
Institutions**



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Global Activities of DETC Institutions

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Introduction

Recognizing that many DETC institutions are increasingly involved in overseas operations and anticipating the application of more non-U.S. universities to DETC for accreditation, Michael Lambert, at the fall 2004 meeting in Notre Dame called for an occasional paper that would survey and examine existing international programs and partnerships of DETC institutions.

The goal was two-fold; first, to tap the past experience and patterns of those already involved and thus provide heads-up information and guidance to institutions who either were contemplating beginning or expanding overseas programs. The survey thus would provide current patterns of participation that in turn could benefit DETC members.

The second goal was to generate issues and concerns to the DETC Accrediting Commission, which has the responsibility to develop policy and procedures for overseas operations, especially the recent application of foreign universities.

Irving H. Buchen of the IMPAC University faculty volunteered to author a DETC Occasional Paper on the subject. He sent a survey to DETC institutions in January 2005. What follows is the analysis of the survey's findings.

Percentage of Returns

21 completed surveys were returned out of a mailing total of 74 (82 minus 8 foreign). The yield is 27%, which is respectable.

Four categories or patterns of analysis emerged: extent of overseas activity; compliance issues; profile of nature of participation; and personnel participation and processes of initiation and implementation. A brief summary comment by the author concludes each of the four sections.

1. Extent of Overseas Activity

Here are the totaled answers to the three questions of extent:

To what extent is your institution currently involved in global marketing and operations?

6 Not at all 9 Somewhat 3 Moderately 3 Extensively

To what extent are you considering becoming more involved?

1 Not at all 14 Somewhat 2 Moderately 4 Extensively

What do you perceive as some of the principal issues to greater global involvement?

7 Costs 8 Compliance Issues 3 Logistics 3 Other

Comment:

Clearly, the survey caught DETC institutions at a critical transitional stage. The snapshot indicated that a significant number are already involved. Indeed, if the different degrees of participation are combined, a total of 15 institutions emerge. Moreover, the bulk of those responding plan to increase their involvement. Again if

combined, the net total is 20. Finally, the key possible inhibitors are costs (7) and compliance issues (8). The first is predictable. The second is precisely what the survey sought to uncover.

2. Compliance Issues

The question was intentionally open-ended so as not to preclude or limit responses to estimated expectations. Rather, it sought to encourage and accommodate the widest range of responses imaginable. And that range is exactly what surfaced.

Here is a representative sample of the issues raised (the language used by the responders is preserved):

“Translating the value of U.S. accreditation outside of U.S.”

“Degree conversions and equivalents.”

“Different overseas regulatory authorities.”

“Differentiated educational standards.”

“Comparability of standards.”

“Transcript translation equivalents.”

“Language barriers.”

“Score of 500 or 550 on TOEFL too low.”

“Local authorization complexities.”

“Legal dimensions and obstacles to overseas registration, national and local.”

“Variety and extent of licensing differences.”

“Cultural differences such as plagiarism and exam partners.”

“Overlay of other systems of higher education and their programmatic nomenclature (especially those of Great Britain and Commonwealth countries).”

“Adjusting U.S. program applications to those of local practices and culture.”

“Unfavorable or suspicious attitudes toward U.S.”

Comment:

Clearly, the compliance issues raised are as many as they are complex. They range from macro concerns about understanding and valuing U.S. accreditation abroad and navigating other systems of higher education to the micro “nuts-and-bolts” issues of transcript equivalents and culturally acceptable practices of plagiarism and hiring test takers. Assuming the political and diplomatic role of being an American ambassador at large without portfolio may have not been anticipated fully. But evidently, the visionary leaders of DETC institutions rose to the occasion, although they still might benefit from some overall orientation.

Although substantial and vexing, the issues are evidently solvable or at least manageable and amenable. But the value of identifying such a compliance agenda is to provide the specifics for review by the Accrediting Commission and the possible development of overall policies, procedures and standards that would mitigate or minimize all or most of the generic compliance obstacles currently confronting DETC institutions overseas.

3. Program Data Profile of Participation

This section of the survey sought to capture data in four areas: number of foreign students enrolled; number of foreign faculty involved; number and kinds of programs offered; and finally, countries chosen for DETC involvement.

What immediately emerged from the profiles submitted was a breakdown by size of three groups: small, medium and large. Small institutions—some 8—enroll a relatively small number of foreign students ranging from as few as 10 to an average of between 30-40. Medium size enrollments, which involve 6 institutions, range from 300 to 750 students. Finally, 4 institutions tally large enrollments: 1,000, 1,350, 3,027 to 4,300. The total number of foreign students currently enrolled at all DETC institutions is 11,692, although we suspect the actual total—if one factors in 82 DETC institutions—would be twice or three times this figure.

The number of foreign faculty is essentially a function of enrollment size. But what clearly also affected faculty numbers were minimally two complicating factors. The first was distance education itself—self-contained and self-standing programs which require no or few foreign faculty to implement. The second were agreements that often took the form of partnerships which in turn required or mandated hiring of partner faculty. In any case, the total number of foreign faculty currently involved in DETC overseas programs is 861.

The number and kind of programs delivered ranges from 1 to 53, or from a single program to all in-house. Often the ones chosen are mission-specific, such as comparative nutrition. But predictably, perhaps the two most popular exports are programs in business and

information technology. The total number of DETC overseas programs is 124.

Many DETC institutions are involved in the same countries often offering the same kinds of degree programs. In any case, the cumulative total of countries chosen is 183.

Comment:

Although there is considerable variety of countries selected, there are also patterns of preference. Most are in Asia. The next group includes Canada, UK, Europe, and Middle East. The smallest groups are in developing countries.

Such preferential patterns are primarily market driven: numbers of students, supply and demand (need and access), and preference for American degrees especially MBA. Of equal and critical importance given delivery via distance education is degree of connectivity. That in turn is a variation of national GNP and individual average annual income. Finally, although English has become the international language, there seems to be a preference for developing relationships with English speaking or UK Commonwealth countries. That is understandable, given the number of the compliance issues noted above that are language related. In any case, the total number of countries involved, even though the same ones are counted many times, is impressive.

Putting the data together in one display set, here is the summary:

Total number of foreign students: 11,692

Total number of foreign faculty: 861

Total number of programs: 124

Total number of countries: 183

It is thus no small matter to note that currently DETC institutions enroll 11,692 overseas students in 124 programs in 183 countries and employ 861 foreign faculty.

4. Personnel Participation and Negotiation and Implementation Involved

It was deemed important and helpful for those institutions contemplating initial or expanded involvement overseas to benefit from the experience of those already there—specifically their answers to four basic questions:

- Who took the lead position?
- Were meetings face-to-face or distant?
- Did it involve negotiating and/or signing legal documents?
- How would you sum up the overseas experience?

In the majority of cases the DETC President/CEO was the principal or only initiator and negotiator. Occasionally, he initially led a team of administrators. In other cases, it was the provost or VPAA. In one instance it was a Director of International Programs. Not accidentally, he was associated with one of the largest programs. Indeed, that may be a sign of the future especially as size and complexity increase.

The majority of contacts required going abroad and conducting face-to-face meetings. Oddly, only rarely are foreign representatives invited to the U.S.

Presidents often favor a direct involvement. Many are entrepreneurial and pride themselves on their proved skills of assessment and negotiation. Also they are usually the ones who have to make the final decisions anyhow, especially if budgets are involved. Then, too, they are particularly sensitive to compliance issues and to accreditation never being jeopardized or compromised.

In almost every case the signing of legal documents or agreements was involved. In two instances they were drafted or reviewed by attorneys. In general, the legal language of standard contracts was the norm.

Finally, most found the overseas experience to be expanding and exciting because it offered a new and different challenge. A few found it to be mixed or moderately productive, but not to the point where the involvement was abandoned or jeopardized. Wrestling with unfamiliar and hard-to-define issues generally was found to be bracing.

Comment:

Given the general absence of full time faculty at distance education institutions, it is not surprising that administrators take the lead. In addition, many DETC institutions are still small enough for presidents and vice presidents to be totally knowledgeable about their capacity and aspiration. Finally, when such initiatives emanate from

the board, the president is the one responsible for implementing those decisions.

Two other matters are worth noting. First, if current and new DETC institutions increase their overseas operations, specialization may be required or valued. More directors of international programs may be appointed, their salaries underwritten by income generated. Second, if workshops to orient DETC administrators to overseas operations are needed, happily a strong cadre of knowledgeable facilitators already exists within the DETC institution ranks.

Overall Conclusions

Clearly, the time was ripe for DETC to take stock of overseas involvement of its institutions. The numbers alone justify the current inquiry. Moreover, the momentum of existing programs when added to the prospect of new participants impart to such surveys the importance and value of its serving as an early warning and/or opportunity system. Finally, with foreign distance universities seeking accreditation, DETC clearly is at a major policy branch point.

Happily, the survey not only documents the need for policy review, but also provides a number of compliance guidelines for future discussion. Indeed, those compliance issues perhaps may be the survey's most important finding. They position DETC once again to serve its members in a creative way, in this instance proactively and globally.

About the Author

Dr. Irving H. Buchen is a member of the faculty of IMPAC University and Capella University. A long time national and international consultant, Dr. Buchen also has helped to design both online and traditional academic programs for a number of foreign universities in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. He holds a Ph.D. in Communications and Business from The John Hopkins University, an M.A. degree in American Civilization from New York University, and a B.A. in English and Journalism from New York University. Dr. Buchen is on the doctoral business faculties at Capella University, and is certified for online teaching and course design. He has taught full time at Cal State, the University of Wisconsin, and Penn State University. His teachings include a variety of graduate courses. He has authored more than 150 scholarly articles and eight books; his most recent book is “The Future of the American Workforce” due to be released in May 2005.

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