

Promoting International Education: An Academic Vice-President's Approach

Kenneth W. Rea

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness," Mark Twain wrote. "Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." For diplomatic historians, travel and international education have long been part of the profession. Today, Twain's words carry even greater meaning for our students.

I have always been a strong supporter of international education. My advocacy originated in a personal journey. I grew up in northern Louisiana, in a very "little corner of the earth." I did not study abroad while I was an undergraduate; my interest in international education came instead from my history and political science professors at Louisiana Tech University (at the time, Louisiana Polytechnic Institute). I especially enjoyed a course on East Asia, and out of that course grew my interest in Chinese and Japanese history. I received my M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Colorado, where I studied with Professors Earl Swisher and Joyce Lebra. Their commitment to international education had a lasting impact on my life and work.

When I became the vice president for academic affairs at Louisiana Tech in 1987, the university had already been a proponent of international education for a long time. However, it did not have a specific plan to promote international education campus-wide. Situated in a rural setting in Ruston, which has a population of 20,000 and is located 70 miles east of Shreveport and about 260 miles north of New Orleans,

Louisiana Tech enrolls approximately 11,000 students, many of whom are the first members of their family to go to college. My overarching objective was to ensure that international education became part of their undergraduate experience. Therefore, with President Dan Reneau's support and that of the academic deans, unit heads, and a campus-wide faculty committee, I launched the Tech International Initiative to promote undergraduate international education.

This initiative had five key parts. The first was the International Education Committee (IEC). By creating the IEC, the university immediately raised the visibility of international education. My role as the IEC's chair is to ensure that it receives the necessary funding to meet its purpose, which is to promote international education throughout the campus. The IEC approves the courses that may be used to satisfy an international education requirement. It also awards summer study-abroad scholarships to undergraduates. The academic units recommend applicants, and the IEC selects recipients based on merit and financial need. Scholarship funds come from the academic deans, the president, and my office.

The second part of the initiative involved expanding study-abroad opportunities. For almost twenty-five years, the university had a successful program in Rome. In 2004, I formed a committee to evaluate the program and the international education needs of our student body. The committee recommended that we end the Rome program and diversify study-abroad choices. In response, the university

joined the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) to ensure greater access to study-abroad programs. More important, we began promoting our own discipline-based study-abroad programs. This step led to a Spanish-language program in Costa Rica, a French quarter in Paris for art students, a Tech-London program for theater and English students, a history and architecture program in Florence, and a forestry program in Honduras. College of Education students have traveled to Korea to gain experience as well. Faculty interested in leading a study-abroad group may apply for funding to visit a proposed site before gaining final approval and recruiting students. Other faculty initiatives have resulted in exchange agreements with foreign universities.

The third component of the initiative was the implementation of an international faculty development program. Because faculty development is the key to internationalizing the curriculum, my office sponsors a program that sends faculty abroad during the summer. The faculty may conduct research, but the program is meant to help them develop their international expertise. Those who receive grants are required to take part in the CIEE's summer faculty development seminars. My office covers the cost of the seminar, while the recipient's college or department underwrites the remaining expenses. Since the program has been in place, we have sent an average of three faculty members abroad each summer. On returning to campus, they give a brown bag lecture for the Center for Academic and Professional

Development and another lecture to their academic unit. By the end of the academic year, they must show how they have integrated international content into their courses.

The fourth part of the initiative was the launching of the "Shaping the 21st Century" series. We recognize that most of our students will graduate without studying abroad. Although we continue to try to increase the number of students who do go abroad, we also want to bring an international experience to those who do not. Therefore, we created a lecture and cultural program that we call "Shaping the 21st Century." Each year, the

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<http://www.shafr.org/publications/annual-dissertation-list/>

The 2008 list is now available!

IEC selects a nation or region that will have a major influence on our students' lives. It then sponsors a series of events, all open to the public, that begins with a campus assembly featuring a distinguished scholar and goes on to include food, art, photographic exhibitions, films, and lectures by visiting and resident scholars. The Office of Academic Affairs collaborates with the colleges, departments, and the honors program to bring the distinguished speakers to campus. For example, the Department of History and its American Foreign Policy Center underwrote lectures by Jonathan Spence and David Shambaugh in the "Focus on China" series in 2007. Mark Von Hagen and Maria Carlson were among the scholars who took part in the recent "Focus on Russia" series. In addition to China and Russia, the program has focused on the Middle East and India and in the spring of 2009 will focus on Latin America.

Originally a month long, the "Shaping the 21st Century" series now extends through the spring quarter. We have been especially pleased by the popularity of the India art exhibition, which has traveled to several other universities, and by the number of elementary school students who have visited the art and photographic exhibitions. The increased interest in international education on campus has also spread to the community: the local parish library has partnered with the university by hosting faculty lectures and exhibitions.

The final component of the initiative was the convening of a campus-wide conference to promote greater discussion on campus about international education. Academic Affairs and the IEC hosted this conference in the fall of 2007. The one-day event brought together interested students, faculty, and administrators. In the fall quarter of 2009, my office will sponsor the second of these campus-wide conferences.

Louisiana Tech is committed to providing students with study-abroad opportunities and to internationalizing the curriculum,

and we have made substantial progress toward those goals. Universities that want to achieve similar objectives must develop a plan that will be funded, will become institutionalized, and will garner faculty support. Administrators must remain activists and identify faculty leaders who will mentor their colleagues in internationalizing the curriculum. They must also set and evaluate international education goals, while recognizing that the response from each college within the university will be different. Some colleges move quickly; others need prompting. Increasingly, accreditation agencies are helping in the development of international education programs. However, presidents, chancellors and chief academic officers must take every opportunity to stress international education and to fund campus-wide efforts. In doing so, they send a clear message to their faculty and administrators that international education is important.

To end on a historical note, I have found that being a proponent of international education is a little like being a Protestant missionary in mid-nineteenth century China. The task is daunting, but if one is committed to the cause, one cannot afford to become discouraged.

Kenneth W. Rea is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of History at Louisiana Tech University. He serves on the Louisiana Board of Regents' International Education Committee.