



Infusing Diversity in Business Management Education Through Strategic and Innovative International Partnerships



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Abstract: Business education has long been a key driver of economic and social development worldwide (Helms, Rumbley, Brajkovic, & Mihut, 2015). The driving force for the transformation toward globalized education is supported with Kashkan and Egorova's (2015) research on the concept of the new economy of knowledge. Business students in developing and first world countries must understand how to interact with students from other cultures and diverse backgrounds. This takes the purpose of diversity from that of demographic reporting to enriched student and faculty experience. In addition to the internationalization of campuses and classrooms, an innovative way to promote diversity in business management education is through strategic international partnerships. These partnerships combine study abroad, faculty exchange, and transfer and sharing of knowledge through joint symposia. Helms et al., noted, "As countries have become more interconnected, and business, industry and organizations increasingly operate across borders, higher education, too, has by necessity become a global enterprise" (p. 3). Business colleges have a unique opportunity to strategically foster and promote diversity and inclusion. The mandate for business school leadership is clear.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, Business Management Education, International Partnerships



The College of Business set forth as part of its strategic plan, the goal of internationalizing its undergraduate and graduate business programs. A strategic partnership was forged with a Chinese University in the Hebei province, creating a 3 plus 1 opportunity for Chinese students. They would study the CUC's business curriculum for three years, and then finish their 4th undergraduate year on campus. Faculty travel to Hebei throughout the year in 8 week intervals to teach. In fall 2016, the first group of 15 students arrived on campus to begin their last year of study. Fall 2017, it is anticipated that 30 students will be arriving to complete their fourth year. To date, it has been a successful partnership, with students excelling academically. Parallel to establishing this partnership, a concerted marketing effort was put forth to recruit international MBA students to pursue their studies. As of the March 2017 census, 40% of the MBA population is comprised of international students. Success in internationalizing the student body has been achieved. The challenges remains to encourage students to appreciate the diversity socially, and for faculty to take advantage of the diversity within the course room. In addition, the University is slow to respond to the needs of the diverse student body as it relates to services.

According to Helms, Rumbley, Brajkovic, and Mihut (2015), "higher education has long been recognized as a key driver of economic and social development worldwide" (p. 2). If an institution wants to internationalize its campus, then cultivating an institutional culture that embodies diversity and interconnectivity should be a primary goal (Wilcox, 2014). In the United States, for example, there is research that indicates that American students do not always welcome international students into their academic community. Glass conducted research at four different research universities. He interviewed 40 international students who described American students as kind and helpful but not playing a significant role in their lives (Redden, 2014). Redden also looked at Garius' research at Baruch College. Garius found that 40% of the international students identified that they did not have any close American friends. This speaks to a lack of purposeful socialization that the university could facilitate. Diversity is everyone's responsibility.

Terui's (2012) study perhaps was the most unsettling in that it spoke to the challenges international students felt they received from their professors. Arkoudis and Tran (2010) conducted research that identified the ethnocentric views of faculty when asked about the problems that international students face when attending a U.S. higher education institution. They included reluctance to participate in class, lack of understanding of the lecture, poor writing skills, lack of independent learning, lack of critical thinking, and an over reliance on the book.

According to Lasbrooke (2010), "Globalization must permeate the entire college and become a way of thinking about business education and business (p. 1). In order to effectively execute a university-wide human capital strategy, it is necessary that senior leadership not only supports the vision but communicate that support up to the board level and down to management. According to Santin and Bucchi (2014), "leadership that drives innovation and change is about vision, and about engaging everyone involved in a common cause to help transform the vision into reality" (p. 5). Innovative leadership that is forward thinking can stimulate a "more team-oriented approach" (p. 6). Universities that suffer from analysis paralysis will lose their market share to competitors who understand the opportunities that exist in internationalizing their campuses.

Conclusion: Business school leadership can promote diversity by including strategic partnerships into the strategic vision, and plan. This can help create a global agenda that includes promoting diversity through establishing strategic international partnerships. Bersin (2012) stated that operational execution for encouraging diversity in the business management programs takes place at the mid and senior leadership level. Wilcox (2014) encouraged "university leaders who are considering internationalization efforts to breakdown current campus silos and promote an integrative approach" (para. 10). The goal is to ensure diversity in the business school student body, the faculty, and the curriculum. This plan could provide long-term stability and financial return for the organization. Most importantly, it sends a signal to the international community that the university's business program encourages and supports diversity and international student inclusion.

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