

## **Curriculum Integration through Partner Collaboration: A US/ UK Bachelor's towards Master's Initiative**

Jenifer Cushman  
Ohio University Zanesville, USA

Tom Kyle  
University of Leeds, UK

### **Abstract**

Global learning is an emerging imperative for the higher education in the twenty-first century. In the context of the work of Jane Knight, Susan Buck Sutton, and Daniel Obst towards internationalization, strategic partnerships, and collaborative degree programs, a UK and US institution are working through challenges to create a new kind of partner degree that could be a model for liberal arts colleges in particular. With the standpoint that, as institutions of higher education work together to enhance global learning, they can be most effective by adopting a collaborative rather than competitive approach, international officers at the partner institutions are engaging faculty and departments across the institutions to formalize and streamline the bachelor towards master's degree across a number of disciplines. Already in 2013, a pilot student who studied abroad in the UK while working on her undergraduate degree at a liberal arts college has returned to the study abroad site to complete her master's degree in museum studies. It is hoped that the fruit of such efforts will attract domestic students interested in global learning as well as international students unfamiliar with the concept of a liberal arts college, and will form the basis of future collaborations towards curriculum integration, perhaps through technologically-facilitated learning.

### **Introduction**

Global learning is an emerging imperative for the higher education in the twenty-first century. Peter Stearns (2009) notes that a substantial majority of students seeking colleges "claim that global education opportunities... [are a] significant factor in choice of college" (p. 40), even as organizations such as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) encourage institutions to re-envision the academic program for the twenty-first century. At the recent AAC&U "Global Learning in College: Asking Big Questions, Engaging Urgent Challenges" conference, David Paris (2013), AAC&U's Vice President of the Office of Integrative Liberal Learning and the Global Commons spoke to the need for new curricular pathways. Echoing the spirit of "Dancing with Robots" by Frank Levy and Richard Murnane (2013), who emphasize that "teaching today's foundational skills requires changing how core subjects are taught" (p. 25), Paris advocated for shaping the curriculum around the global themes facing our world today, connecting courses that touch problems from several angles.

In her important work on the internationalization of higher education, Jane Knight (2008) addressed some of the twenty-first century forces that shape higher education and internationalization, listing the Bologna process as an example of major reform (p. 7). The spirit of collaboration present in the Bologna process is central to internationalization. As institutions across the globe work together to enhance global learning, they can only be effective by adopting a collaborative rather than competitive approach. As David Kirp (2003) recognizes, the competitive business model is not adequate for higher education. “Analogies between higher education and the private sector or government shouldn’t be pushed too far” (p. 113), he acknowledges, wondering: “Can a university maintain the intellectual world that Thomas Jefferson sought to represent... if learning becomes just another consumer good?” (p. 145).

Of course, collaboration between institutions of higher education must begin with strategic priorities. Susan Buck Sutton and Daniel Obst (2011) introduce their *Developing Strategic International Partnerships* by emphasizing the importance of approaching partnerships strategically, arguing “unequivocally for greater and more creative use of international partnerships by institutions of higher learning” (p. xiv). Partnerships, they say, are being asked to engage in curriculum building and course enhancement (p. xv). Naturally, curriculum integration of global learning is only achieved through collaboration, specifically collaboration between academic departments and faculty members.

One possible outcome of faculty collaboration is collaborative degree programs, which Knight (2008) lists as one of a number of internationalization strategies that have become landmarks since the 1990s (p. 3). In *Joint and Double Degree Programs*, Daniel Obst and Matthias Kuder (2009) highlight the “emergence of collaborative degree programs, such as dual diplomas, joint degrees, consortia, and other forms of curriculum cooperation” (p. xiii). In this same volume, Christi Degen and Carsten Klenner (2009) outline a double Master in Business Administration with partners of the University of Cologne (p. 135). Degen and Klenner’s example is typical for collaborative degree programs, which are often in the area of business and management.

Aware of the need for models in the humanities and for liberal arts colleges, Juniata College in central Pennsylvania, USA and University of Leeds, England, UK are enhancing global learning through international collaboration by exploring innovations that are possible as a result of their thriving direct exchange relationship. These targeted efforts have resulted in a partner Bachelor’s degree for Leeds students studying at Juniata, and more recently a partner Master’s degree for Juniata graduates at Leeds. Certainly both partners have faced challenges along the way, but the lessons learned and, more importantly, the resulting model can be useful for others in the field.

### **Global Learning at Juniata**

At Juniata, study abroad is purposefully integrated into student courses of study. Inspired by the institutional promise to provide Juniata graduates with experiential learning opportunities related to each student's course of study, faculty and staff work

with counterparts abroad to cultivate global learning opportunities with international partners, including partner degrees and technologically-facilitated learning. Specifically, faculty members collaborate on curricular initiatives that also yield research partnerships and sabbatical sites, for example. Since courses and grades transfer from partner sites, Juniata has developed POE (major) study abroad advising guides and course equivalency lists that match to partner institutions. One result of faculty engagement in international efforts is that international exchange students at Juniata are eligible to participate in a partner bachelor's degree if they study two semesters at Juniata. A number of these agreements are reciprocal, for example "The Juniata-Bocholt Transatlantic Double Degree in International Management" outlined by Cushman (2009) in Obst and Kuder's anthology.

More recently, Juniata faculty are looking to the promise of technologically-facilitated instruction for global learning opportunities. Although Juniata's institutional commitment to online learning is not yet articulated, a number of faculty members are learning from the SUNY Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) model to engage with international partners. As Sarah Guth (2013) explains in the final report for the NEH-funded Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities project, "COIL (also referred to as globally networked learning or virtual exchange) is not a technology, but rather a new approach to teaching and learning that brings together geographically distant instructors and students from different lingua-cultural backgrounds to communicate and collaborate through the use of online communication tools" (p. 2). From older "distance learning" and iTV technologies to more recent video conferencing platforms, Juniata globally-networked learning initiatives have included student engagement in Intercultural Communication with a Russian partner, Spanish with Mexican partners, computer science with a German partner, and Digital Video Media with British and Irish partners. It is envisioned that faculty members will increasingly interact with international partners through technology to cultivate shared student projects, team-taught courses, and, ultimately partner degrees.

### **Internationalism at Leeds**

As one of the largest universities in the UK, The University of Leeds' journey towards internationalization has developed in a variety of ways. The range of benefits (including but not exclusively financial) of receiving students from overseas has meant international recruitment has been a long established tenant of Leeds' strategy. As a research intensive university there has also been a great deal of international collaboration at the research level – as membership of the Worldwide Universities Network suggests. In recent years, increased attention has been placed on internationalization at home by trying to broaden the opportunities for all Leeds students to infuse their studies with a global perspective – whether by building international dimensions into curricular materials or encouraging students to participate in some form of overseas activity.

Although comparative data is scarce, it is believed that Leeds has one of the most active undergraduate exchange programs in the UK. Students also have the opportunity to participate in language assistant placements (usually at European schools assisting in teaching English as a foreign language) or work placements

overseas. A recurring challenge at an institution the size of the University of Leeds is simply being aware of the huge range of international activities that may be going on at any given time – although a summary of research and industry links and a list of current exchange partners are useful in this regard.

### **The Juniata-Leeds Partnership**

Juniata first began its relationship with Leeds in the 1990s through an exchange partnership with an affiliated institution Ripon College, now York St. John University. Initially conceived as an honors study abroad site for Juniata students, Leeds eventually began sending students to Juniata after the first of a number of Juniata delegations visited Leeds in 2008. As official international partners, Leeds students were eligible to participate in the Juniata Partner Bachelor's Degree, a program whereby students from direct exchange partners who meet the criteria and successfully complete two semesters of specific courses at Juniata may receive a Bachelor's degree.

Connecting faculty members is central to the successful partnership, and Juniata and Leeds regularly engage in interactive visits on both sides. Connecting academic departments more deliberately and encouraging faculty discourse concerning curricular matching thus empowers faculty members to integrate the study abroad experiences more intentionally into student courses of study. With increasing student and staff mobility on each end, conversations about possible joint initiatives became increasingly concrete, and have culminated in the most recent manifestation, a Bachelor towards international Master's degree.

Under this Master's initiative, a Juniata graduate enrolls in a Master's program in a department at Leeds they encountered already as an undergraduate exchange student. In the final form of the program, Juniata students would be admitted to Juniata and, by fall sophomore year, as part of the study abroad application process, students would declare their intention to pursue an international Master's degree program. Students would preliminarily apply to the Leeds department's Master's degree program as part of the Juniata study abroad application process. Approved students would spend their junior year at Leeds undertaking the fundamentals of the partner department's Master's degree. Students would return to Juniata for the senior year, graduate with a Bachelor's degree from Juniata, and then return to Leeds to complete the Master's degree. There are inherent advantages to the student with this model: Juniata students are well supported in their first year at Leeds as undergraduates on an existing exchange, so that they return after Juniata graduation to an international site with which they are already familiar. Very few resources and little structural and curricular change are needed, and nothing is imposed from above; only interested departments participate.

The US bachelor-toward-UK master's initiative recently entered the applied stage. In 2013, a pilot student who studied abroad at Leeds during spring 2012 while working on her undergraduate degree at Juniata has returned to Leeds to complete her master's degree in museum studies. The student took three classes in the University of Leeds school of Fine Art, History of Art and Museum Studies in her junior year, before returning to Juniata for senior. Upon graduating from Juniata spring 2013, the student

returned to Leeds and is currently studying towards an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies, which should be completed by August 2014.

One factor that contributes to the viability of a partner Master's degree is the fact that (in common with many UK institutions) the entry requirements to Leeds Masters programs are intentionally broad in scope, entailing the equivalent of an upper second class UK degree in any 'related' subject. The focus of the entry requirements is on the classification and quality of bachelor degree awarded rather than the specific program and course content of the degree. This means the need for intensive curriculum 'matching' is not particularly pressing, which reduces the complexity of the arrangement and does not place additional burdens on the student to take the 'right' courses. In the case of the pilot, the student's familiarity with the faculty, university, city and pedagogic culture were the key factors in facilitating a smooth transition through the joint program rather than the need to follow a narrowly-defined program of study. Similarly the successful completion of the Juniata bachelor degree to the required standard was the critical factor in confirming suitability for the master's program at Leeds rather than the specific course content on the study abroad semester or the Juniata bachelor degree as a whole.

Despite a certain amount of flexibility in the academic content, a sustained period of discussion and negotiation was required to ensure the international Masters concept was sound. Crucially, faculty and staff from both Leeds and Juniata with the appropriate knowledge of their university programs were involved in site visits to facilitate face-to-face discussion.

With this pilot student, the program promises to broaden global learning opportunities and enhance institutional collaboration. International officers at both institutions are engaging faculty and departments across the institutions to formalize and streamline the bachelor towards master's degree across a number of disciplines. It is hoped that the fruit of such efforts will attract domestic students interested in global learning as well as international students unfamiliar with the concept of a liberal arts college.

### **Benefits, Challenges, and Lessons Learned**

It is important to note that this initial foray has come only after much back-and-forth travel and conversation over the course of a number of years. While some resource investment, specifically in the form of travel funding, is necessary for such initiatives to be successful, the benefits to both institutions are substantial. When faculty members and departments develop solid relationships with specific international partners, faculty collaboration, sabbatical sharing, and student exchange increases. Possibilities for creative collaborations grow; for example, the departmental connections resulting from the international Master's program could also be used to develop international distance education courses, either by technologically linking courses taught at Juniata and Leeds, or by exploring models for online courses such as those developed by SUNY COIL.

In the area of enrollment and retention, benefits exist for both domestic and international students with the international Master's program. The program could prove to be a

particularly appealing recruiting tool for Juniata, which is primarily an undergraduate institution, as it highlights the advantages of a US liberal arts education to students perhaps unfamiliar with the model, as excellent preparation for graduate school. For some international populations, the specific combination of US Bachelor's and UK Master's is especially desirable. Finally, possibilities for degree cohorts could aid recruitment and retention.

For Leeds, the program is, in effect, a graduate recruiting strategy. Specific partner departments can develop solid relationships with departments at Juniata, which can increase faculty collaboration and exchange, as well as numbers of exchange students from Juniata. Recruiting students from the US to UK Masters programs is a difficult but rewarding activity – Master's students from the US are typically quite successful at Leeds, but can be hard to attract. Leeds is likely to be a less well known city to most American undergraduates than (for example) London, Cambridge or Edinburgh, so the opportunity to recruit from a pool of students who already have familiarity with the city is a valuable one. The relationship with Juniata (exchange agreements and the joint Masters model) in particular is a key element of Leeds' wider internationalization activity where the University is looking to build wide-ranging and deep collaborations with a relatively small number of high quality institutions around the world. The obvious differences in size and academic profile between the institutions heighten the complementary nature of the relationship.

Certainly as with any intercultural, distance partnership, challenges exist in the Juniata/Leeds model. Since the most important aspect of the partnership appears to be the face-to-face conversations, funding and faculty motivation are first and foremost. The most pressing need in establishing five-year international master's degrees in multiple academic areas is funds for faculty members in interested departments to travel to compare and coordinate curricula. It was the early involvement of academic staff in a specific field that enabled the partner Master's concept to take flight so swiftly. Because of the decentralized structure of many European universities, US institutions do well to focus initially on only one or two academic areas when establishing a double degree with a European partner. The "bottom-up" approach will reap the quickest rewards, as disparate academic divisions in European institutions tend to function relatively autonomously, and sometimes even run their own international offices independently of the larger institution.

Other difficulties exist, of course, primarily the financial concerns of students, but also the logistical intricacies of enrolling in an institution abroad. Ultimately, it is still daunting for a US student to consider graduate study abroad. For this reason, it could be desirable to establish a number of short-term scholarships as a developing partnership takes shape, to generate interest in the program and encourage students to iron out potential stumbling blocks. It is also important for departments on both sides to be flexible regarding required courses, including timing of course offerings and acceptance of courses and credits from the partner institution. This flexibility may be more difficult with Science and Engineering subjects which may have more stringent pre-requisites at the Master's degree level than their counterparts in the Arts and Humanities. Finally, it is unfortunately the case that institutional change seldom comes quickly. Such an

initiative, dependent as it is upon multiple conversations and constituencies may get relegated to the back burner during its development. Moreover, with staff turnover what it is, the momentum may be easily lost if those committed to the project move away from one of the institutions.

### **Future Possibilities**

With a Leeds delegation to Juniata autumn 2013, and a follow-up from Juniata to Leeds summer 2014, it is expected that new efforts will emerge. With further and closer collaboration between faculty members and courses, as well as departments and programs, perhaps facilitated through technology, joint degree collaborations become more likely. Knight (2008) acknowledges the importance of communication technologies to partner collaboration, as they “are enabling a far larger percent of students to have international contacts and access to information. Distance and time are no longer barriers” (p. 7).

Other possibilities for partnership development also exist. Leeds students could join Juniata faculty-led short-term domestic and international programs, and Leeds could look to develop its offerings in this area and open these to Juniata students. Like most UK institutions Leeds has relatively little faculty-led activity and could benefit from Juniata’s experience. Ultimately, the partnership could result in the development of true joint degrees at the undergraduate level, such as a 2+2 with online components. International partnerships that are connected in this way at the departmental and course level are more likely to be vibrant and long-lasting, and are ultimately one of the best models for the curriculum integration of global learning in the twenty-first century.

## References

- Cushman, J. (2009). The Juniata-Bocholt Transatlantic Double Degree in International Management. In D. Obst & M. Kuder (Eds), *Joint and double degree programs: An emerging model for transatlantic exchange* (pp. 129-132). New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Degen, C., & Carsten K. (2009). Elevating existing study programs through the integration of double degrees: The double master in Business Administration at the University of Cologne. In D. Obst & M. Kuder (Eds), *Joint and double degree programs: An emerging model for transatlantic exchange* (pp. 135-141). New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Guth, S. (2013). *The COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities: Final Report*. Retrieved from [http://coil.suny.edu/sites/default/files/case\\_study\\_report.pdf](http://coil.suny.edu/sites/default/files/case_study_report.pdf).
- Kirp, D. L. (2003). *Shakespeare, Einstein, and the bottom line: The marketing of higher education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Knight, J. (2008). Higher education in turmoil: The changing world of internationalization. *Global Perspectives on Higher Education* (Vol. 13). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense. Retrieved from <https://www.sensepublishers.com/media/475-higher-education-in-turmoil.pdf>.
- Levy, F., & Murnane, R. J. (2013). *Dancing with robots: Human skills for computerized work*. Retrieved from Third Way Next website: <http://content.thirdway.org/publications/714/Dancing-With-Robots.pdf>
- Obst, D. & Kuder, M. (Eds). (2009). *Joint and double degree programs: An emerging model for transatlantic exchange*. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.
- Paris, D. (2013, October). *Re-forming liberal education: Remapping and integrating general education, the major, and the student experience*. Paper presented at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Global Learning in College: Asking Big Questions, Engaging Urgent Challenges conference, Providence, RI.
- Stearns, P. N. (2009). *Educating global citizens in colleges and universities: Challenges and opportunities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sutton, S. B., & Obst, D. (Eds). (2011). *Developing strategic international partnerships: Models for initiating and sustaining innovative international linkages*. New York, NY: Institute of International Education.



## About the Author

**Dr. Jenifer Cushman** is Campus Dean at Ohio University Zanesville. Formerly International Dean and Associate Professor of German at Juniata College, winner of the 2012 NAFSA Senator Paul Simon-Award, Cushman earned her PhD in German from the Ohio State University. She engaged in the University of Minnesota study abroad curriculum integration effort as a faculty member at UMM. One of the first Association of International Education Administrator's Presidential Fellows, she now mentors for the program, chairs the 2014 Simon committee, and is a contributor to the recent NAFSA publication "Improving and Assessing Global Learning." Dr. Cushman can be reached at [cushmanj@ohio.edu](mailto:cushmanj@ohio.edu).

**Tom Kyle** has worked at the University of Leeds since 2007, initially in the Study Abroad Office before moving into their International Marketing team in 2010. Tom graduated with a BA (Hons) in Music for the University of Nottingham and is currently studying part-time towards an MA in Management of International Higher Education at Edge Hill University. He can be reached at [T.Kyle@adm.leeds.ac.uk](mailto:T.Kyle@adm.leeds.ac.uk).