# #5: Partnership Building Through North-South Mobility Programs

Universities Canada.

**The Voice of Canada's Universities**

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January 2017

# Creative North-South Mobility Models

**Truly reciprocal exchange opportunities e.g. Madagascar Field Course**

**Mobility for students and faculty alike e.g. Dalhousie in Cuba**

**Programs that recruit students from multiple universities → e.g. Canadian Field Studies in Africa**

**Collaborative online courses → e.g. Blackboard Collaborate course for third year nursing students at Western University and University of Rwanda**

## Partnership Building through North-South Mobility Programs: Important Considerations and Innovative Opportunities

**Target audience: Canadian university faculty members and
mobility program administrators**

International partnerships offer universities prestige and a competitive edge in national and global rankings. According to a national survey conducted by Universities Canada, high-quality partnerships were considered a priority at 79% of the institutions surveyed (Universities Canada 2014: 7), and these partnerships take place in a large number of countries around the world. Student mobility programs play an important role in institutional partnership building and university internationalization strategies. The majority of Canadian students travel to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Europe (Universities Canada 2014 and Duncan 2014), yet university administrators see value in facilitating student mobility to other regions. To grow and enhance North-South student mobility, however, requires careful consideration of the opportunities and challenges of partnership building.

**Important Considerations for North-South Mobility Partnership Building**

*Identifying potential partners*

One of the challenges many universities experience is lack of access to formal guidelines or policies identifying potential partners. International program staff and administrators often develop their own protocols, and many institutions rely heavily on word of mouth or existing relationships among staff, faculty and deans as the primary source. Partnerships may emerge following site visits by university administrators or as a result of a faculty members' long-standing work in a particular country. To expand partnership arrangements, Canadian university administrators identified a need for a database of Global South institutions interested in partnerships and the nature of the partnership preferred.

*Establishing and maintaining strong partnerships*

Establishing and sustaining a strong partnership requires significant in-person contact. University administrators indicated that spending one week in-country every year or two was necessary to maintain good relationships. These in-person site visits generate trust, reciprocity and a mutual understanding of shared goals. However, resources for travel and partnership maintenance are few, and university administrators identify this as a significant challenge. One strategy for coping with travel-related financial constraints is attending conferences organized by international associations (such as NAFSA, EAIE and AIEA – see Additional Resources at the end of this paper for more information).

Smaller universities, and those with fewer resources to devote to student mobility, face the unique challenge of finding enough students to make partnership agreements feasible and to sustain numbers. This insecurity can put otherwise very strong ethical partnerships in jeopardy. Speaking candidly about the ethical dilemma of having to cancel a mobility program due to limited student interest with a long-time partner in Central America, one program coordinator said, "This is an ethical problem because you build a partnership based on the principle of reciprocity and then you still just walk away, and there is zero you can do about that. So I'm deeply concerned about that moving forward."

Some universities seek out students from other institutions to meet required numbers for program implementation. Well-established programs across Canada often draw students from multiple institutions. Examples include the Trent in Ghana and Trent in Ecuador programs and the Canadian Field Studies in Africa course offered by McGill University, in partnership with the University of British Columbia, Queen's University and Western University. Other strategies employed to maintain student numbers within North-South mobility programs include establishing partnerships with third-party providers known for their strong reputations and shared values. Uniterra—a joint program of World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) —was mentioned as one such example. Third-party providers are able to reach students across institutions in Canada.

*Reciprocity and genuine collaboration*

Effective North-South partnerships require institutional reciprocity and collaboration. One strategy identified to achieve this was to ensure equal numbers of incoming and outgoing students in mobility programs. Interestingly, universities faced challenges on both sides of this equation, with some reporting difficulties recruiting students to take advantage of outbound opportunities and others indicating inbound recruitment was disproportionately challenging, often due to financial inequities. Reciprocity of opportunities is also an important ethical consideration.

Beyond the numbers, other indicators of reciprocity and collaboration thought to be important by interview participants included: institutional symmetry in terms of the perceived value of student mobility and the roles and responsibilities of students; having expectations clearly delineated in jointly written memoranda of understanding or partnership agreements; equal and shared decision-making power among institutions; and shared responsibilities in terms of reporting on the partnership and evaluating students' learning.

*Evaluating partnerships*

Many universities still do not collect formal and consistent feedback from host country and partner organizations after student placements. Administrators spoke about the difficulty of collecting regular feedback from host country partners, mainly due to resource-related constraints and a lack of accessible evaluation tools. When evaluating mobility programs, host country partners must participate in the data collection process in order to ensure that programs are improved, changes are made and negative impacts are eliminated. Nonetheless, the time and resource burden of providing such data must be factored into the overall costs of facilitating North-South mobility programs.

**Innovative Models for Mobility Partnerships**

*Creating reciprocal exchange opportunities*

One strategy for addressing ethical considerations is to ensure that institutional partnerships forged around mobility opportunities offer reciprocal benefits for the hosting institution. Since 2006, Western University students have travelled to Madagascar to attend classes at l'Université d'Antsiranana and worked with community organizations on projects concerning environmental conservation. In the summer of 2016, six Malagasy students travelled to Canada and worked with a local organization on projects in London, Ontario, where the university is located. This program is run by the Department of Anthropology at Western University in partnership with l'Université d'Antsiranana. Said one of the co-creators and co-facilitators of this partnership "One of the things I really like about this is that it flips a lot of what you find in some of the [North-South mobility] programs we are (rightly) more critical of... Here what we're doing is rather than have these [Malagasy] students come to Canada and think we are giving, giving, giving to them, we are having them come here and give to the community here. There is something really appealing to me about that idea; that in fact the Malagasy students are participating in a form of service learning here in London (Ontario) in the same way that our Canadian students participated in a form of service learning in Madagascar." For more information on this program, go to: https://www.facebook.com/MadagascarFieldCourse/

*Creating mobility opportunities for students and faculty members alike*

Dalhousie University has offered students the opportunity to study in Cuba for 20 years. In addition to the two models of student mobility (the two-week intensive program and the semester-long program), Dalhousie has also recruited Cuban faculty members as visiting scholars in Halifax, where students have exposure to these experts and can learn more about Cuban culture, history, politics and development. This model has facilitated ongoing interest among students at Dalhousie and other Canadian and American universities.

*Collaborative online courses*

Some universities are experimenting with online systems and courses in order to mitigate some of the ethical concerns that exist around reciprocity in North-South student mobility. One example is an online course being launched by the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing at Western University and the University of Rwanda. It is a full-semester course that uses Blackboard Collaborate (a web-based system for collaborative education and training) to connect third-year nursing students in Rwanda with their counterparts at Western to learn about clinical decision-making within the context of culture, nursing practice and health systems, using real-life scenarios. Online courses also alleviate financial barriers for international students.

**Additional Resources**

· For more information about international associations and conference opportunities for networking and building partnerships agreements, see:

  · The Association of International Educators (NAFSA) - https://www.nafsa.org/

  · The European Association for International Education (EAIE) -http://www.eaie.org

  · The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) - http://www.aieaworld.org

· For information about guidelines for building international partnerships, see: American Council on Education - International Partnerships: Guidelines for Colleges and Universities: http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/International-Partnerships-Guidelines-Colleges-Universities.aspx

· For information on strategic partnerships, see: *Global Perspectives on Strategic International Partnerships* by C. Banks, B. Siebe-Herbig and K. Norton, Institute of International Education and German Academic Exchange Service, 2016. To access this report online, go to: http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Publications-and-Reports/IIE-Bookstore/Global-Perspectives-Strategic-Partnerships#.V5TuaOZtdRE

**Endnotes**

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Photo courtesy of Tristan Goulden, participant in the *Students for Development* program in 2008.