Saving International Programs in Colleges of Agriculture

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Abstract

This case study of the International Programs Division (IPD) of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, is the third in a series. The first case study (Etling, 2001) told how the International Programs Division was revitalized after years of decline. The second case study (Etling & Barbuto, 2002) told how the program grew in the second year and reacted to new challenges with creativity and teamwork. This case study describes the third and final year of efforts to strengthen the Division and adapt to budget shortages only to have the office closed and the programs merged with the university-wide International Affairs Office, which previously dealt with study abroad and international students and visiting scholars.

The purpose of this case study is to describe 1) options for maintaining IPD that were considered, 2) factors that determined the outcome, and 3) lessons learned that may be useful for the future as well as for international programs at other universities. Options for keeping an international presence included severely downsizing the office, merging it with the research, teaching or extension divisions, or merging with the university-wide office, International Affairs. The outcome was determined primarily by political considerations.

Lessons learned included the need to have such programs affiliated with a research, teaching, or extension division. Cooperation among international program directors in neighboring universities, to anticipate and adjust to problems before they threaten the existence of such programs, was recommended. Assistance from USDA and NASULGC were also recommended.
Introduction

The importance of international programs in colleges of agriculture is generally and strongly acknowledged. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) clearly sees partnerships with colleges of agriculture as essential to its mission.

In today’s global political and social environment, international markets are in constant flux. The need to keep trade doors open, overcome trade barriers and find new markets for U.S. commodities has never been greater. The Land Grant/USDA partnership is working to retain markets and discover new ones. (USDA, 2002)

This partnership cannot be effective without some mechanism at the administrative level in colleges of agriculture to make it happen. Liaison is needed between USDA and the faculty and programs of the colleges. Most colleges of agriculture have agreed and supported this relationship as key to the mission of the college. The strategic plan of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR) at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL), concurs. It mentions the need to update curricula to include preparation for the global community, to enhance programs in global marketing, to support global climate and environmental change programs, to develop culturally diverse support systems, and to enhance public understanding of IANR roles in society and the world. In a section labeled “globalization of IANR programs,” the Institute proposes to

- Build a strong global presence and understanding of undergraduate and graduate programs and courses.
- Meet the global information needs of Nebraskans with research, education and outreach programs that have global dimensions.
- Contribute to the global marketing of Nebraska’s agricultural production and processing.
- Enhance the global aspects of youth programs. (IANR, 2000)

Since 1976 IANR has had an International Programs Division (IPD), equivalent to the Agricultural Research Division, the Cooperative Extension Division, and the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) which is the division for resident instruction. That International Programs Division has fully accepted its broad role not only to partner with USDA but also to partner with the other divisions, the academic departments and the special programs of IANR to globalize the Institute. Their brochure from 1985 describes this relationship.

American agriculture is universally envied for its technical sophistication and productivity. This great United States asset is related to many of the severe current world problems: balance of payments, increasing exports of surplus production, world population growth, political stability, food for 35 percent of the world’s people who are hungry, and economic improvement for the 60 percent earning less than $200 per year. Nebraska, a major food producing state, finds its interests and opportunities closely related to other parts of the world. Thus, it is appropriate that the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources of the University of Nebraska address the international elements of its missions of education, research and service. Several of these elements are
• developing institutional capabilities,
• strengthening Nebraska programs,
• supporting U.S. efforts and interests,
• addressing world food needs,
• developing people,
• educating students – both domestic and foreign,
• increasing research efficiency,
• sharing technology, and
• broadening understandings. (IPD/IANR, 1985)

Globalization of IANR and UNL is critical if they are to realize their missions and serve their constituents (students, faculty, staff, and agriculturalists in the region) in this global age. With the exception of a few individuals who do not understand that we are now, like it or not, inextricably linked to the global community which includes a global food system, globalization has been embraced by the majority of those constituents.

Recent economic recession in the United States, however, has meant budget cuts that have changed people’s perception of the importance of international programs offices. These cuts have threatened programs, academic departments and especially international programs in agriculture at U.S. land-grant universities. More than one international program office has been closed down in the past year. Others have had budgets, and even programs, cut. Some observers expect this trend to continue.

At the Seventeenth Annual Conference of AIAEE in Baton Rouge, a case study described the evolution of IANR’s international programs office. From an office with ample funding, able direction of a Dean, and diverse programs across IANR during the 1980’s, IPD declined to an office with a part-time director, limited funding and limited programs by 1998. IANR administrators considered closing the office.

Why did the office decline? Reasons include the end of the Cold War with a resulting shift of federal funding to domestic priorities. The U.S. Agency for International Development, one of the main sources of funds that saw international programs in agriculture grow and prosper during the 1970’s and 1980’s, shifted its priorities away from agricultural development to disaster relief and special programs that addressed State Department priorities. As this happened, international programs in the larger colleges of agriculture adapted to the age of globalization and repositioned themselves to carry on with their mission of globalizing their colleges. In many smaller colleges the decline of major funding sources encouraged many administrators to turn away from aggressive international programming. A vocal minority of farmers and ranchers encouraged this decline by asking, “Why are we investing college resources in agricultural development of competitor countries.” In the absence of articulate supporters of the global mission of the colleges of agriculture, international programs offices lost support, funding and staff, all of which fed the de-emphasis and further led to replacing deans with directors and then part-time directors.

Background

At the University of Nebraska the negative impacts of changes discussed above included a loss of 90% of income for international programs in agriculture between 1990 and 1999. Positions were lost and the Dean of the International Programs Division (IPD) was replaced
by an interim, part-time Dean. The vision for international programs narrowed and then became unclear. Faculty with international interests lost confidence in the ability of IPD to assist them. One third of the soft money reserves were used up in 1999. Program planning was ignored and needs assessments were largely abandoned. Communication with faculty and students was less frequent, no advisory committees existed, and contacts with regional and national groups of international program directors diminished.

The Administrative Council of IANR discussed several alternative futures for IPD. One of the alternatives was to close the IPD office. A second alternative, conduct an internal search for a full time “director” (instead of a Dean) to rebuild IPD, was ultimately selected although it was not a unanimous decision. In 1999 a position description was written, an internal search was initiated, and the position was filled starting October 1, 1999.

Following a program planning process that involved all stakeholder groups, priorities were identified and creativity was used to reinvigorate the program. New proposals and programs were developed with stakeholder involvement. Partnerships with USDA and USAID were cultivated. A new undergraduate minor in international agriculture was developed. Together these actions turned around an office that had lost much of its funding, direction and support (Etling, 2001). Much was learned in the first year of reorganization.

Year two, however, brought new challenges and opportunities. A second paper at the Eighteenth Annual AIAEE Conference in Durban, South Africa, (Etling & Barbuto, 2002) described which efforts were continued into year two of the reorganization, what new efforts were initiated, and how scarce resources were augmented to strengthen the program and maintain momentum. Efforts continued from year one included emphasis on the undergraduate minor and study abroad. The number of minors increased by 466% in 2001. Two new study abroad programs were initiated and two others were continued. A directory of international jobs was updated to help graduate and undergraduate students find jobs after graduation. Geographical interest groups (mainly faculty) started in 2000 continued and carried out at least one major project for each group.

New efforts focused on residents of Nebraska. IPD collaborated to offer nine seminars and conferences on impacts of globalization upon agriculture and families as well as a multi-state immigration forum. A senior faculty associate position was created in IPD to augment scarce resources. Student interns helped handle clerical duties and special projects. Evaluation results indicated increased participation in IPD programs. Grants brought in funds to support programs. IPD was recognized by USDA as a strong, stable program.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to provide a follow-up case study of how the director of the international programs division (IPD) faced his most challenging (third) year when IPD was again proposed for elimination. The case study will describe 1) options for maintaining IPD that were considered, 2) factors that determined the outcome, and 3) lessons learned that may be useful for the future as well as for international programs at other universities.

**Methods**

In this case study, program planning methods were supplemented by management techniques. Program management techniques came from sources on leadership (Block,
1993; Johnson, 1999; Lansdale, 2000; Sample, 2002; Covey, 1990), business (Farson, 1996; Levinson, 2001; Peters, 1987; Schiffman, 2000; Ury, 1991;), and extension education (Buford, et.al., 1995). These management techniques were attempts to find “outside-the-box” solutions to shortages of funds, materials, human resources and time.

**Results**

On December 14, 2001, during a regular meeting between of the IPD Director with his supervisor, he was told that the administration of the College (Deans, Vice Chancellor, Associate Vice Chancellor and Assistant Vice Chancellor) had decided that the international programs office would be closed and that he would be reassigned. He was told that this action had been decided based on a shortfall in state revenues needed to support to the University of Nebraska. He was told that this was not being done because IPD was unimportant, nor because the program had poor evaluations (annual unit evaluations had been strongly positive) nor because of IPD leadership (the director’s annual evaluations had been strongly positive). This action was one of a number of cuts that had been decided by college administration because they were the least unacceptable of an array of proposed unacceptable actions. The director was asked to help college administration determine how to maintain an “international presence” for the college in the absence of an IPD office.

Several choices for reassignment were given to the Director to consider. His main concern, however, was to consider options for the IPD office and for an ongoing international presence in the college. A few days later the Director was told that the budget situation might not be as severe as anticipated – that the office might be saved. He was advised to prepare a strong presentation for his next annual “unit evaluation” in January. In the next weeks several options to closing the IPD office emerged.

**Options considered.** The **first option**, preferred by the Director, was to keep the office open as it was currently organized (a division administratively equivalent to extension, research and resident instruction). A summary of accomplishments and impacts of IPD (see attachment) was prepared for the January unit evaluation session. The unit evaluation resulted in another strongly positive evaluation for the unit and the director. In the meantime the amount of the state revenue shortfall and, hence, the needed cuts increased so as to make this option unrealistic.

At the opposite extreme, the **second option** was to close the office. This option was determined by the Director to be avoided if at all possible. It would leave the college without a presence for international programming. It would leave students, enrolled in the international minor, without a home and communication network. It would leave the college in an awkward position regarding active grants, contracts and memoranda of understanding. It would cut off important partners. Finally, it would send a message throughout the college, university, state and nation, that the Institute was no longer offering international programs.

A **third option** was to downsize the office by decreasing the budget and terminating the two staff. This option was resisted by the Director. He refused to fire staff, whose evaluations were positive, merely because that would be an expedient decision. An office with no staff and a minimal budget would be little better than a closed office.

A **fourth option** was to merge IPD with one of the other IANR divisions (research, extension or resident instruction). That option had been adopted at some other Colleges of
Agriculture. The only Dean who showed interest in this option, however, was the Dean of resident instruction. Furthermore, that interest was not made evident for several weeks.

The fifth option was to merge IPD with International Affairs, the university-wide office which managed study abroad, recruitment of international students, and visas for international students and scholars. IPD had a long history of collaboration with International Affairs on topics of mutual interest related to the globalization of the university. International Affairs, however, had not provided proposal-writing support to faculty, had not worked with the globalization of Cooperative Extension, and had not offered minors or courses in international topics for students. These were all IPD functions that International Affairs had neither understood nor embraced. So the merger had limited common ground from which to develop. Little overlap existed, historically, between the two offices.

To university administration and the Board of Regents, however, a merger between International Affairs and IPD was perceived to be a natural elimination of overlapping units. Therefore, at the university level, this fifth option was determined to be most desirable and its implementation was ordered.

Factors which determined the outcome. In the end, the decision made was political. Although little budgetary relief was accomplished by the merger, the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the University of Nebraska were able announce the elimination of a division and an administrator, a public relations action viewed favorably by many stakeholders who did not understand what they were losing. International Affairs was able to centralize all international programs with this merger even though they did not have, nor inherit, the resources needed to take over IPD’s responsibilities. The ex-director of IPD was assigned to work 51% as a staff member in the office of Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and 49% as associate director for International Affairs.

**Lessons Learned (Conclusions)**

In times of severe budget cuts, undesirable choices must be made. The final decision is not always based on logic, on program accomplishments or on impacts. It is not always based on the needs or mission of the institution. In a climate of severe budget cuts, subjective decisions and expedient decisions may be made.

Public relations and reports of program accomplishments are critical to the survival of international programs. Resources dedicated to public relations efforts must always be balanced with resources dedicated to program productivity. That balance, however, can shift quickly in a climate of budget cuts. Stakeholders, especially decision makers, must be intimately aware of benefits and costs of programs proposed for downsizing or elimination.

IPD might have been less vulnerable if it had been administratively under one of the deans (academic, extension or research) rather than an independent division. Independence in programming is lost when international programs is under another dean; however, that arrangement provides more security in times when small units are vulnerable.

As a post mortem is conducted, one realizes that perhaps nothing done after October 1, 1999, could make a difference. The loss of IPD started years ago when it was downgraded and neglected. At that point some administrators might have made up their minds that IPD was not viable.
At some point, assistance from administrators of international programs at peer institutions might have saved IPD. In the 2001 case study, one of the conclusions was, “competition among universities must be minimized; partnerships will be desirable and even necessary for some programs to survive” (Etling, 2001). The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, who also have a stake in strong international programs offices in colleges of agriculture, need to consider how they can best help international programs offices in these changing times.

Management techniques, leadership and creativity are all useful in trying to overcome shortage of resources. Outside-the-box solutions to these shortages can be effective in helping to keep threatened programs afloat. Ultimately, however, directors who implement outside-the-box solutions may find that their programs are not understood or supported by more conventional administrators at higher levels.

Many steps taken to strengthen IPD after October 1, 1999, were beneficial and should be considered by international programs offices in other colleges of agriculture. Needs assessment, advisory committees, geographical interest groups to identify proposal priorities, and partnerships with a variety of institutions and organizations in Nebraska and around the world, were beneficial measures. Creating a “faculty associate position” (buying a quarter time of an interested faculty member from his academic department) was another creative approach to resource limitations. Sharing leadership with faculty, students and stakeholders off campus was also beneficial. These measures showed results and had positive impacts in rebuilding IPD.

Merger with International Affairs does provide opportunities for globalizing the university as well as the college of agriculture. Most International Affairs offices, however, have no experience in providing support for extension and research, particularly in agriculture. Building new programs into the traditional base of International Affairs is a long, sometimes painful, process.

**Recommendations**

Advisory groups should be used to build or rebuild programs and offices like IPD. Internal stakeholders are important members of these advisory groups. External stakeholder groups must also be represented in the advisory function. Based on the experience of IPD separate advisory committee groups (internal and external to the university) are needed in order to maintain the interest and participation of the external committee members.

International programs must be continuously marketed so that stakeholders are aware of their benefits. Administrators, especially, must be informed about accomplishments, opportunities and costs to the university if such programs are lost. Some of the public relations must be done from within the institution. External groups such as USDA, NASULGC and peer institutions, must also share in the responsibilities to keep stakeholders aware of the importance of international programs in agriculture.

USDA should accept more responsibility for helping administrators of land-grant universities to understand the importance of international programs in agriculture. In the future USDA could provide support to other universities who are at risk of losing their international programs offices. A task force, like GASEPA, might be organized by USDA or NASULGC to anticipate similar problems at other institutions and be prepared with advice including an array of options for reorganizing offices and programs like IPD. A team of
“trouble shooters” should be maintained to respond rapidly to opportunities and crises. Early warning should also be a function of this task force. Sometimes trouble shooting is too late in the process to make a difference.

Competition among international programs offices at different land-grant universities must be decreased and collaboration increased. Competition is inherent in the competitive grants system favored by funding agencies but it also weakens individual, especially smaller, offices.

Educational Importance

In “a strategic vision statement for learning, scholarship and engagement in the new century,” the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) recognizes that member institutions are being challenged to return to their philosophical roots. As we do so, NASULGC says,

“...we must begin with the premise that we all share at least one common community in the new millennium—the community that has become euphemistically known as the global community.” To implement this idea of globalization NASULGC proposed seven goals

1) Make internationalization an integral part of the university’s mission and strategic plan;
2) Promote greater involvement of all students in significant international education experiences;
3) Create and maintain a stimulating and supportive academic and cultural environment for international students and scholars;
4) Increase the international activity of faculty and professional staff;
5) Internationalize the curriculum;
6) Assure that research and scholarship pertaining to international matters permeates disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields; and
7) Ensure that international awareness is an integral part of appropriate outreach and extension activities. (NASULGC, 2000)

NASULGC’s International Agriculture Section organized a task force to develop an “agenda” for the globalization of state universities and land-grant colleges. The agenda bears the same name as the task force which wrote it: Globalizing Agricultural Science and Education Programs for America (GASEPA). The rationale for this agenda speaks to the importance of international agricultural programs in colleges of agriculture.

We are on the brink of a new millennium.....Many actions in one part of the world rapidly impact on the rest. Understanding and appreciating our partners in other nations will be essential in order to live and compete in this environment.....The U.S. economy, in particular its agricultural and natural resources sectors, is being challenged as never before to...operate in globally competitive and environmentally responsible ways.....Globalization of the agricultural economy requires that agriculture...be researched and taught with respect to their relationships...to emerging markets in other countries.....Our world class faculty must give students enriching experiences that are based on a rigorous curriculum and international
experiences that optimize learning….U.S. colleges and universities should continue to be involved in programs which promote social and economic well-being in other nations (GASEPA, 1999).

These international programs in agriculture must be saved if land-grant universities are to fulfill their mission in this age of globalization. Creative approaches will be needed to respond to budget cuts and to political solutions that ignore the importance of international programs which are much broader than study abroad and hosting internationals. We must learn from our experiences.

In the meantime, those of us who are concerned about international programs in agriculture need to share our concerns and experiences. We must learn from each other’s experiences and we must help each other.

**References**


IPD/IANR. (1985). International Dimensions of IANR Programs. Lincoln, NE: International Programs Division, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Nebraska, Lincoln.


Attachment – Program Summary

International Programs Division – May 1, 2002

Beginning in October of 1999, the International Programs Division made changes to strengthen and reorient global/international programming. Efforts during the 1999-2000 academic year focused on building a program structure to foster globalization. New vision and mission statements were drafted; an advisory committee was organized to assist with strategic planning; stakeholder participation was expanded; a website was established; existing partnerships were revisited and new partnerships were initiated. During the 2000-2001 academic year, efforts focused on strengthening the more promising partnerships, writing funding proposals for program priorities and establishing the new minor in international agriculture for undergraduates. During this 2001-02 academic year, priorities have been to 1) connect with Nebraska agriculture, 2) globalize the undergraduate curriculum, and 3) continue efforts to secure outside funding.

Major Accomplishments:
• International programs office was reorganized (vision, web page, advisory structure).
• Seven geographical interest groups identified priorities and carried out seven projects.
• Study abroad scholarships grew to 58 in 2001 (twice as large as the previous year).
• Three new study abroad programs started in 2001. Three more will start in 2002.
• The new minor in international agriculture grew 467%. Faculty/student interest is up.
• A “jobs directory” was developed for students with interest in international agriculture, natural resources and family science. The directory will help students find employment.
• A state-wide seminar to discuss the impacts of globalization on commodities was offered.
• A study tour in France for members of the livestock industry was successful.
• A multi-state forum in Lincoln on immigration issues involved community educators.
• Four international family strengths conferences (two abroad) were supported.
• Introduction to International Agriculture (AGRI 292) was revised, taught to 78 students.
• Seventy faculty from 26 countries received special training through IPD. The contracts for these training programs generated $31,000 for IPD and $57,000 to cooperating units.
• Two 4-H curricula were edited: 1) Learning About Japan and 2) And My World.
• Twenty-two proposals for projects were initiated; 13 were funded and six are pending.

Impacts:
• A reorganized International Programs Division better supports the Institute’s mission.
• The seven geographical interest groups have found new opportunities for IPD stakeholders.
• Increased participation in international activities by stakeholder groups has been documented.
• Students use international experience to get jobs.
• Thirty-five faculty have received $600 grants (average) for international experiences.
• Partnerships with 14 institutions in nine countries were created or strengthened.
• Faculty turn international experience into better educational programs for Nebraska.
• Over 75% of faculty receiving travel grants later help with other IPD programming.
• INTSORMIL (International Sorghum and Millet research program) received assistance to
extend their contract with USAID and raise their level of funding.
• The 4-H/Japan curriculum has been used by 4-H staff and youth in 31 states and Japan.
• The web page has improved communication of international opportunities to stakeholders.
• Faculty from other countries trained through IPD have assisted with other programs.
• Grants and contracts received have reduced IPD dependence on internal resources.
• IPD was recognized by USDA as a strong international programs office.

Major Initiatives:

• Strengthen international partnerships and secure funding for appropriate programs.
• Continue to develop a special relationship with the Tibetan College of Agriculture.
• Help USDA develop a fundable proposal for entrepreneurship training in Asia.
• Provide information on myths and misconceptions of international development.
• Work closely with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Congressional Delegation.
• Provide recognition for faculty, students and Nebraska residents who contribute to excellence in international programming.
• Build enrollment in the international minors and expand opportunities for study abroad.
• Implement new FIPSE grant to support study of agriculture in Europe.
• Support efforts of USAID, USDA, and others to promote globalization of higher education through expanded program opportunities and funding.
• Revise the international minor for the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences.
• Plan and implement a “family strengths” conference in China.
• Assist in the reorganization of the MidAmerica International Agricultural Consortium.
• Expand the five-state “immigration forum” to include new topics and audiences.
• Complete a web-based “directory of faculty resources” for use with new proposals.
• Significantly increase the number of Fulbright awards received by the University of Nebraska.

Next Steps:

Work with faculty, staff, students, and representatives of agricultural groups to carry out the major initiatives (above) in such a way that programmatic balance is achieved among stakeholder groups and among teaching, learning, research, and extension. Form temporary consortia among universities to leverage resources and secure funding.

Intriguing Ideas:

• Develop multi-national problem solving teams to address mutual concerns.
• Organize an international network of interactive learning centers.
• Extend international programs around the state and world through distance education.