BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH
INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS OF UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This case study describes how international programs in agriculture at the University of Nebraska were revitalized. After the Dean’s position was replaced by an interim, part-time director, the International Programs Division (IPD) experienced a loss of staff, low morale, and a reduction in the budget. A new full-time director was appointed after an internal search. Using a collaborative program-planning process, needs assessment techniques, and management guidelines, the IPD was rebuilt. Partnerships were forged which led to grants, contracts and new proposals. Results and impacts of the new program, at the end of the new director’s first year, are documented.
Introduction

International programs in colleges of agriculture have seen great changes in the last 20 years. From the multi-million dollar USAID contracts of the 1970's and 1980's, income opportunities have declined so that the existence of international programs offices at some smaller land-grant universities has been threatened. Larger university programs in international agriculture like those at Michigan State and Cornell had built up the infrastructure, including numerous large and small contracts, so that they could weather these changes. Other universities have had to adapt to reduced opportunities for large grants. Some have cut staff or reduced programming. Some universities have assigned international programs responsibilities to administrators or even non-administrative faculty with other responsibilities. At many universities, international programs in agriculture have declined in visibility and impact at a time when international issues and challenges have become increasingly important to students, faculty and the agricultural community of the states.

To address this concern, the International Committee on Organization and Policy (ICOP) of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) initiated a group called Globalizing Agricultural Science and Education Programs for America (GASEPA). This group of agricultural and extension educators, whose representatives reported to AIAEE at the last annual conference, is developing a new agenda for international education for higher agricultural education (Acker, 2000). This agenda includes five dimensions:

- enhance global competitiveness of U.S. agriculture through human resource development;
- develop/disseminate information on market, trade, business opportunities and finances;
- establish mutually beneficial collaborative global partnerships;
- promote trade through global economic development; and
- promote global environmental quality and stewardship of natural resources management (GASEPA Standing Committee, 1999).

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 (Deans and Directors) of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (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. In 1999, a position description was written and the internal search was initiated.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study is to describe 1) how the new IPD Director of IANR at the University of Nebraska addressed the problems in order to rebuild international programs in agriculture, 2) how partnerships were forged and 3) how a program to support globalization of IANR was planned and implemented during the first year.

Methods

In this case study, program planning methods and administrative techniques were used to accomplish the three-part purpose. These methods included formation of an advisory team, organization of geographic interest groups to help determine program priorities, use of a program planning process (describe the
situation, assess needs, write goals and objectives, identify resources, write a plan, implement and evaluate the plan). Needs assessment techniques that were used included review of office records, individual interviews, community forum, seminar and group discussion. Administrative guidelines were adapted from a variety of data sources including the new Director’s experience in building or rebuilding other educational programs (see figure 1).

*IANR consists of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences, as well as the Agricultural Research Division, Cooperative Extension Division, Conservation and Survey Division, IPD and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis.

Data Sources

The new Director had created an undergraduate major in Extension Education at the University of Arizona, in the Department of Agricultural Education, between 1975 and 1978. He had organized a youth soccer league and a “nucleus group” to help county supervisors address problems of unincorporated communities. Both of these educational programs were developed as a part of his responsibilities as “Arizona extension community development specialist” between 1979 and 1987. Between 1990 and 1997, he administered an undergraduate minor in international agriculture at the Pennsylvania State University while rebuilding the international 4-H program. All of these program development efforts are described in unpublished reports by the author.

Other data sources included unpublished “white papers” on globalizing programs in agriculture at IANR and experiences and insights of international program directors gained from visits to IPD offices at neighboring universities and from documents generated by these directors. Also, contacts with state and national groups related to IPD were helpful. These groups included the Nebraska Corn Growers, the Agriculture Builders of Nebraska**, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, the Nebraska Congressional Delegation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Board on International Food and Agricultural Development, NASULGC, AIAEE, and the North Central International Agriculture Directors.

Management texts that were useful to the new IPD Director included those by Buckingham and Coffman (1999); Buford, et. al. (1995); Covey (1989); Lansdale (2000) and Peters (1987). From these texts, and from the previous experiences described above, a set of program development guidelines were extracted and followed (figure 1). A “management notebook” was started to assist in program development. Included in the loose-leaf notebook were sections on program-planning documents, needs, resources, key contacts within the university and state, potential partners external to the university, a summary of projects being pursued, and suggestions for administrative decision-making and program management.

Results

Results came from following a proven program planning process throughout the year and incorporating creative elements at different steps in the process. Based on the situation described above, needs and opportunities were listed. The list was expanded through visits to academic departments and units of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. Needs seemed to fall into two categories: 1) those requiring immediate attention and a “quick fix,” and 2) those requiring initiation of long-term efforts.

**A group of agricultural leaders, incorporated in 1971, whose mission is to bring about an improved and more prosperous Nebraska agriculture.

Figure 1. Administrative guidelines to guide IPD program development.
Attempt to balance the program emphases among faculty, students and Nebraska residents while linking with partners outside Nebraska and the United States.

- Emphasize integrity over competitive advantage.
- Use ethical principles including universal values embraced by all major religions and humanistic philosophies. These include fairness, caring, trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, moderation and cooperation.
- Do not try to be all things to all people everywhere all the time; set topical and geographical priorities for programs.
- Emphasize teamwork for bottom-up programming.
- Do not accept grants and funds that do not fit program priorities and partners’ needs.
- Emphasize creativity over “the way it has always been done,” innovation over duplication. Seek new methodologies for program development and evaluation, rather than relying on worn-out methods that are no longer consistent with program values and principles.
- Question everything as programs are developed, and encourage stakeholders to question everything we do.
- Look for opportunities for synergy as program and administrative choices are made.
- Strive for balance among stakeholders, balance of benefits among partners, and a balanced approach to program planning that avoids “procrastinate and panic.”
- In all efforts, be guided by excellence; quality will be valued over convenience and speed, opportunism will be qualified by excellence.

How problems were addressed

A logo was designed and an organizational chart was developed to show program components. Both designs used creativity to call attention to a new direction for IPD. The logo included four words that express program values: teamwork, synergy, excellence and balance. A rationale (justification) for international programming was written.

In order to respond to a backlog of requests for travel support, a policy and application for IPD travel support for faculty and students was developed. The policy emphasized the need to justify travel support on the basis of potential contributions to IANR and IPD.

Another immediate problem was to clarify relationships with the University of Nebraska Office of International Affairs. This office has responsibility for issuing visas, providing legal counseling on immigration, coordinating international student organizations, and coordinating study abroad for the entire campus which includes making travel arrangements. Both IPD and International Affairs work to encourage an “international climate” on campus. The new IPD Director initiated discussions with International Affairs personnel, which led to a brief document that clarified the common purposes and the unique responsibilities of each office.

Visits to other IANR departments and units were undertaken as a means of receiving advice and to inform faculty and students of opportunities for international programming. Some of these visits were realized in brief visits to departmental faculty meetings; others were conducted as hour-long seminars. Other “quick fix” efforts included decisions to continue with a monthly newsletter and with monthly “international eye openers” which were breakfast meetings featuring speakers (usually faculty) on international projects or issues.

Long term efforts that were initiated included 1) revision of the undergraduate “international” minor in agriculture and marketing the minor to students and faculty, 2) assessing the benefits and costs of grants and contracts to train faculty and students from other countries, 3) involvement with national groups and organizations committed to help “globalize” university programs in agriculture and family living, 4) development of an IPD web page to improve communication, 5) extending the processes of planning and
evaluation to 2010, and 6) initiating partnerships to provide educational opportunities for stakeholders and to apply for external funds.

A committee was formed to revise the undergraduate minor requirements. Its recommendations were approved by the curriculum committees in April, 2000 and a brochure was written to describe and market the new minor. During the fall semester, eleven faculty agreed to be advisors for the new minor. An advisor’s packet was developed and delivered to the faculty. Four students’ applications for the minor were approved.

The new director chose to become active with key national organizations and to travel to their meetings (these organizations are listed in the “data sources” section) as this involvement would provide important information on rebuilding the IPD office. A decision was made to participate in as many of these meetings as possible while delaying international travel.

With help from IANR communications specialists, a new web page was developed to improve communications. Since funds were not available, all assistance was voluntary and the web page was not in place until June 2000. It incorporated the logo into sections on personnel and organization of IPD, meetings and events, the newsletter and other publications, how to apply for travel support, and useful links.

A program plan was written, with input from all stakeholder groups, which included a vision and mission statement, annual objectives, four-year objectives and ten-year goals. Evaluation instruments were developed so that information can be gathered and adjustments made to the plan.

How partnerships were forged

In order to foster partnerships with faculty, staff and students, two “advisory team” meetings were scheduled. Anyone interested in international programs was welcome. Participants at these meetings helped develop the IPD vision and mission statements and discussed program priorities. They broke into six geographical interest groups (Latin America, Asia, Africa, Newly Independent States, South Pacific, and Western Europe) to allow faculty to share experiences and interests for future programs.

Objectives were written and incorporated into an “action plan.” Implementation of the plan began immediately while needs assessment continued. In order to communicate with stakeholders external to the university, an inexpensive brochure was written. It incorporated documents previously developed but also added other pieces. A notable addition was a list of IANR programs that constituted “institutional strengths.”

A colleague at Penn State invited the new IPD Director to become a partner in a study abroad program based at Moscow State Agroengineering University. This partnership opened a full-semester, 18-credit opportunity for agricultural students to study in Russia with English-speaking Russian students. Two IANR students and one faculty member will pilot the program during the spring semester of 2001.

A small “innovation grant” was won from USDA to construct an instrument to guide the development of partnerships with universities in other countries. This instrument, a checklist of important questions and steps to insure solid partnerships, has been developed through an e-mail questionnaire with expert respondents and has been pilot tested with representatives of institutions in France, Mexico, and Costa Rica. It will help IPD to move efficiently into its next phase, securing international partners to help globalize IANR and provide opportunities to students, faculty, and residents of the state.

A second grant proposal has been submitted to USDA, which will pay for travel in China of a team of U.S. academics whose purpose will be to negotiate university partnerships. The process of writing this proposal has helped forge potential partnerships with two other U.S. land-grant universities, one of them an 1890 institution.

A third proposal is being developed for a FIPSE grant in Europe to promote exchange of students among six universities (three in the U.S., three in Europe). This proposal, like the previous one discussed, will help six potential partners explore partnership.

How a program to support globalization of IANR was initiated during the first year

The process of rebuilding a program to support globalization of IANR is described, to a large degree, in
the previous sections. Some additional detail, however, is needed.

The process actually began with the IANR Administrative Council decision to continue IPD with a director that would be recruited internally. The application and interviews of candidates required the statement of a vision with a description of how that vision would be implemented.

The new Director’s vision was developed from his experience and his analysis of the needs and opportunities for IPD within the context of IANR, the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and the state of Nebraska. The vision was shaped by the GASEPA agenda. The vision was discussed, modified and approved in advisory team meetings where all IPD stakeholder groups were represented.

This collective vision was then turned into goals and objectives for implementation. The geographic interest groups provided the opportunity for stakeholder collaboration in the implementation of the objectives. These goals and objectives formed the basis for an annual plan, a four-year plan and a ten-year plan.

Evaluation files were begun as soon as the action plan was accepted by College administration. One evaluation instrument, called an “accountability file,” was based on the Director’s position description. For each of the eleven responsibilities listed on the position description, the instrument describes the beginning situation (status) relative to that responsibility. Next is a section on “actions taken” which can be continuously updated. A “to do” section for each responsibility completes the instrument.

Outcomes of the program planning process were diverse. In addition to the goals and objectives for one, four and ten years, a budget was developed and funds secured from internal (University of Nebraska) and external sources (small grants and training contracts).

The six interest groups met 32 times and a seventh group was added by faculty initiative when the Latin America group divided. This group met three times. From those groups came initiatives to write grants and develop partnerships with universities and organizations in the U.S. and around the world. Eleven proposals were started, seven were submitted, and four were funded in 2000. Partnerships were forged with 12 U.S. universities and with 12 universities in other countries through the proposal development process.

Impacts

Although early in the program development process, some impacts can be noted.

- More faculty have been involved in IPD programs and international involvement in 2000.
- Communications have improved as a result of the new web page and the newsletter.
- Grants/contracts valued at $156,005 provided $22,785 for IPD and $32,968 to IANR units after expenses. These funds helped relieve the need for a larger internal allocation.
- Administrative support was provided to the International Sorghum and Millet Collaborative Research Support Program which resulted in re-authorization of the federal legislation creating the Collaborative Research Support Programs and their budget was increased.
- Relationships between IPD and International Affairs improved.
- Training programs were provided for 34 faculty and students from 13 countries. They rated their training 6.5/7 for content and 6.7/7 for overall organization.
- International travel support was provided for 16 faculty and 22 students. 75% of those faculty were later active in other IPD programs.
- A 4-H/Japan curriculum, written, and revised by the IPD Director, was used by professional educators, volunteers and youth in 31 states.
- A new IPD infrastructure (position descriptions for staff, the advisory team, the geographical interest groups, vision and mission statements, plan of work, budget, partnerships, policies, procedures, affiliation with groups supporting globalization) has been created which puts IPD in a better position to realize its vision and mission.

Conclusions

Most land-grant universities face the same problems, although not as severe as Nebraska, in shaping international programs in agriculture. The process used by IPD and the results and impacts achieved by IPD can serve to guide other program directors at other universities.
In addition to the problems addressed to rebuild IPD programs, other challenges to international programming were discovered. These include 1) departmental turf, 2) independence of faculty, 3) institutional complexity, 4) bureaucratic delays, 5) lack of rewards for faculty and staff to get involved, 6) difficulty in evaluating many international projects, and 7) the difficulty of maintaining “balanced” partnerships with universities and research institutions in other countries. Some of these challenges slowed progress in rebuilding IPD and will need to be addressed in future years.

Visits with international program directors at other universities were extremely helpful. Additional visits should be planned so that ideas, successes and failures can be shared to help all such programs. Competition among universities, encouraged by the competitive grant process, must be minimized or overcome. Partnerships will be desirable and even necessary for some programs to survive.

Large grants, while one strategy for long term program development, should not be the basis for international programming in agriculture. Small grants and careful use of existing resources will be necessary. Teamwork at the local campus level, and partnerships beyond the local level, will help offset the loss of large grants. The core of these programs, however, should be a collaborative program development and implementation process. Local conditions will be the final determinant of needs, opportunities and priorities.

A “management notebook” is a helpful technique in documenting needs, opportunities, contacts and social indicators important to program development. This notebook should be expanded and used more to help manage international programs in the future.

**Educational Importance**

Other international programs Deans or Directors will find ideas in this case study to address their program planning and implementation. Faculty will see ways to assist administrators and provide their own leadership for improving international programming. Leaders of these programs must share successes, failures and creative ideas. These programs must be saved if land-grant universities are to fulfill their mission in this age of globalization. Unique and creative approaches within proven program planning processes will be needed as these programs adapt to current challenges.

**References**


