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Curbing Migration of Talent in Africa: Initiatives for Collaborative Action

Leah C. Keino
Iowa State University


Ria Van Wyk
University of Stellenbosch

Suzanne Hendrich
Iowa State University, shendric@iastate.edu

Gary Phye
Iowa State University, gdphye@iastate.edu

Ann Thompson
Iowa State University, eat@iastate.edu

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Abstract

In an effort to address migration of talent from sub-Saharan Africa, a number of higher education institutions are attempting to strengthen or develop graduate programs in several areas. These institutions see the potential for emerging digital technologies to provide new and exciting opportunities for collaboration with Western institutions. Examples of these institutions include University of Stellenbosch in South Africa and Iowa State University, which collaborated on a needs assessment for collaborative action to build faculty capacity through the development of shared Internet-based courses. This article describes this initiative. (Contains a list of 3 resources.)

Keywords

School of Education, Brain drain, Cooperative Planning, Foreign Countries, Graduate Study, higher education, information technology, Institutional Cooperation, internet, Migration, Partnerships in Education, Program Development

Disciplines

Food Science | Human and Clinical Nutrition | International Public Health | Medical Education

Comments

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LEAH C. KEINO
RIA VAN WYK
SUZANNE HENDRICH
GARY PHYE
ANN THOMPSON

... well-educated people from the developing world can be a powerful source for change when they have schools and academic opportunities in their own countries

(Wolfensonb, World Bank President)

A World Bank report indicates that higher education in developing countries is inadequate and

falling further behind, making these countries unable to compete in the knowledge economy on a global basis (World Bank, 2000).

This article describes an initiative conceptualized to explore opportunities for utilizing emerging digital technologies to build faculty capacity, support teaching, research, and outreach and hence increase access to higher education in South Africa.

Although institutions of higher education in the developed world continue to provide educational opportunities for students from these countries, the trend is for graduates to pursue career and professional interests in the West upon completion of their programs. Mato (2001) reported that graduates are not returning to their home countries upon

Leah C. Keino, PhD, (keino@iastate.edu) is an Assistant Professor in FCS Education and Studies at Iowa State University (ISU); **Ria Van Wyk, PhD**, is an Associate Professor, Department of Consumer Sciences, at University of Stellenbosch, South Africa; **Suzanne Hendrich, PhD**, is a Professor, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, at ISU. **Gary Phye, PhD**, is a Professor, and **Ann Thompson, PhD**, is a Professor, Department of Curriculum & Instruction, at ISU.

graduation, and, countries such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, loose thousands of highly skilled experts to the developed countries (mainly North America, the Gulf States, Australia, and Europe) and to movement within the continent. This creates a knowledge vacuum in a number of countries with declining economies. This movement of highly educated professionals (aka brain drain) has a profound impact on higher education, research, outreach, and sustainable development in developing countries.

In an effort to address this migration of talent from sub-Saharan Africa, a number of higher education institutions are attempting to strengthen or develop graduate programs in several areas (Mato, 2001). These institutions see the potential for emerging digital technologies to provide new and exciting opportunities for collaboration with Western institutions. Additional efforts to address this emerging global concern are reported by The Association Liaison Office of USAID (<http://www.aascu.org/alo>), an organization that has supported a number of collaborative partnerships between universities and colleges in the U. S. and those in developing countries. Such initiatives not only increase quality and access to higher education, but also help reduce the knowledge gap created by the digital divide. This knowledge gap has contributed to the declining status of education in developing countries (World Bank, 2000). Hence there is a need for professionals to seek advanced education in the West.

International partnerships improve the quality and access to higher education in developing countries while curbing the migration of much-needed talent. In addition, they provide faculty with experiences that contribute to the enhancement of their global perspectives in teaching, research, and outreach endeavors. According to Acker and Scanes (1998), faculty involvement in internationally related opportunities furthers a university's mission of preparing today's learners to have cross-cultural knowledge, to develop inter-cultural communication skills, and to become aware of political, social, and economic development in the global community.

Overview

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) faculty from the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa and Iowa State University collaborated on a needs

assessment for collaborative action to build faculty capacity through the development of shared internet-based courses. Faculty from both institutions sought international partnerships to support their efforts in teaching, research, and outreach. In addition to exploring ways to "globalize" their curriculum, South African faculty were seeking innovative ways to address post-apartheid changes in their education system that require:

- Increased access and participation in higher education for blacks, women, and adults in order to overcome historically determined inequalities
- Development of new curricula for a more diverse student population
- Responsiveness to societal needs in an increasingly technological economy
- Development of the human capacity to address national needs (Badsha, 1999, p. 39)

The choice of Stellenbosch for this collaboration also was based on its recent restructuring which allowed them to offer graduate courses in English, enabling English-speaking professionals to share some of their experiences in program development, distance learning, research, teaching, and outreach.

Collaboration Process

Initial communication was established through e-mail and a WebCT discussion forum. In addition, a Web site was developed to share photographs, programs, faculty areas of expertise, and additional resources of interest. After 1 year of online communication, faculty met face-to-face in South Africa and Iowa in November, 1999, and June, 2000, respectively. During these exchange visits, faculty familiarized themselves with programs, technology infrastructure, ongoing research, and community outreach, and they identified faculty expertise from each institution. Faculty visited specific sites of interest including home gardens, institutional food services, a food science research center, secondary schools, a mail-order clothing establishment, a local women's association, homes for the elderly, and community housing. In addition, they shared each other's culture by visiting faculty homes, museums, national parks, and historical sites, and they participated in community festivals. During the visits, fac-

ulty discussed and deliberated on areas of interest and identified strategies for future collaboration.

Identified Needs

The team identified the need for a collaborative effort to: (a) enhance faculty capacity to prepare more professionals, deliver workshops, and involve practicing professionals in curriculum development, and (b) utilize distance education technologies to meet the challenges of providing higher education to target audiences. Specifically, they found that:

1. Both institutions were matched in their technology infrastructure and faculty expertise in housing, textiles and clothing, food sciences and human nutrition, education, and hotel, restaurant and institutional management.
2. FCS instructional resources developed by faculty at the University of Stellenbosch and used in secondary schools in South Africa, did not adequately reflect current realities and needs of indigenous people. Although a new curriculum had been developed in the post-apartheid period, most of the resources available to students and teachers fell short of addressing pertinent and critical issues facing families, including poverty, household food security, unemployment, housing, health (HIV/AIDS), gender equity, domestic violence, appropriate technology, environment, and sustainable development. They agreed that these critical issues could become part of the curriculum if teachers and practitioners moved from the technical to a critical science approach in conceptualizing, developing, and delivering educational programs. It was noted that professionals in the West had experiences with this approach and could provide leadership.
3. Although faculty at Stellenbosch are predominantly Afrikaans, they recognized a need to create access for indigenous people to engage in post-graduate education, hence the development of a group of professionals from all ethnic groups. Such a diverse group could lead curriculum transformation, creating an educational system that is more responsive to the needs of all South Africans. This effort responded to current challenges of providing quality higher education in Africa and is sup-

portive of Wolfensohn's suggestion that well-educated people from the developing world can be a powerful source for change when they have schools and academic opportunities in their own countries (World Bank, 2000).

4. To build faculty capacity, exposure to, and interaction with, international professionals is critical for South African professionals. After years of isolation because of apartheid, South African professionals need to participate in international conferences and workshops whereby they can develop professional networks and skills necessary for the development of research, online courses, and outreach programs.
5. Faculty identified the importance of study abroad, short exchange visits, and international sabbaticals as additional opportunities that can support globalization efforts of their host institution while also enriching their individual worldview.

Conclusion

The collaborating team recognized that problems faced by individuals and families transcend national boundaries and require professionals to share knowledge, ideas, resources, and experiences in finding sustainable solutions. They also saw the need to utilize emerging digital technologies to expand access to higher education. This would help to bridge the knowledge gap created by inequities in educational resources between historically advantaged and disadvantaged communities in South Africa, and between the developed and developing countries. Collaborations of this nature can help to curb migration of talent and contribute to the development of a stronger FCS program in South Africa. In the long-term, this would contribute to preparation of FCS professionals who are likely to remain and work in Africa. African professionals who participated would be more likely to create sustainable solutions to problems facing individuals and families in their communities.

Faculty involved in this initiative identified several challenges in developing and sustaining an international partnership:

- Future efforts should be endowed with resources to enable faculty to have more face-to-face interactions.

- More time might be set aside to work on an identified collaboration.
- Faculty could work in smaller specialist groups with a more focused problem that is specific to their area of expertise.
- Faculty should seek external grants that support international partnerships.
- Faculty could explore possibilities for faculty/student exchange while also disseminating skills. Iowa State faculty and students, for example, could help teachers in South Africa expand their knowledge and use of a critical science perspective and integration of technology in their teaching while the South African faculty/students could enrich the multi-cultural curriculum in the West.
- Faculty should continue to explore possibilities for joint research ventures.
- Faculty in the West might seek opportunities to participate in professional activities in developing countries through membership and conference attendance.
- Professional associations in the West could provide incentives for international participants

through reduced membership and conference fees.

- Partnerships should be based on the use of cost effective communications technologies because partnerships are difficult to initiate.

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Additional Resources

- Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation <http://www.aascu.org/alo/>
- Colleges and Universities Partnering for International Development <http://www.aascu.org/alo/CUPID/international.htm>
- United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs <http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges/academic.htm>

Nutrition Education Module Appeals to Students at Georgia State

JANA KICKLIGHTER
SATYA S. JONNALAGADDA
JAMIE MCCLENDON
BARBARA L. HOPKINS

Jana Kicklighter, PhD, RD, LD, (jkicklighter@gsu.edu) is Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Nutrition at Georgia State University. **Satya S. Jonnalagadda, PhD, RD**, is a Senior Medical Affairs Specialist at Novartis Medical Nutrition in St. Louis Park, MN. **Jamie McClendon, RD, LD**, is a former Graduate Student in the Department of Nutrition at Georgia State University. **Barbara L. Hopkins, RD, LD**, is the Academic Professional and Dietetic Internship Program Director in the Department of Nutrition at Georgia State University.

Increasing college students' exposure to health-related information is an important objective (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). Many students are overweight and have poor dietary practices that have an impact on their nutrition status and disease risk (American College Health Association, 2002; Brevard & Ricketts, 1996; Cason & Wenrich, 2002; Cousineau, Goldstein, & Franko,