

Rapporteur Briefing

Breakout Group #6: Institutional Linkages and Partnerships with Foreign Institutions

Paper by David Wiley with Christine Root, Michigan State University

Presiding: Barbara Turlington, American Council on Education

Rapporteur: Cheryl Ryan, The Ohio State University

This breakout session of the "Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education: National Needs and Policy Implications" conference was attended by approximately 32 individuals.

Professor David Wiley, who authored the paper "Increasing the Quality of International Education in the United States with Institutional Linkages and Partnerships with Foreign Institutions", provided participants with an Executive Summary for the session.

Professor Wiley began discussion with a synopsis of his paper, emphasizing a need for those of us in the U.S. to "get our own house in order" with regard to institutional linkages by, in part, refocusing funding policy regarding linkages. He asked two key questions, "How do we choose our partners and linkages?" and "What is considered a true partnership?" between institutions.

When addressing the portion of his paper focusing on best practices between partners, Wiley noted that there is no agreed upon definition of partnerships and that the word 'partnership' has to some degree lost its meaning. He also said an institution's agendas, goals, reasons, and objectives for pursuit of the partnership (and an understanding of those of the partner) must be carefully evaluated. Understanding that imbalances of power as well as of resources between partners may be the reality.

Based on this portion of the discussion, the group's **first recommendation was "the need to agree upon a definition of institutional linkages and partnerships suitable for the international education community."**

Following some detailed discussion about Wiley and Root's 16 guidelines and principles of cooperation, group feedback indicated that a critical mass of model partnerships either does not exist, or that information about such partnerships is not easily available. This discussion led to the group's **second recommendation, that "there is a generalized need for increased numbers of good partnerships in International Education"**. Ideas to satisfy this recommendation included new and/or sustained availability of financial resources for partnership start-ups; virtual or real resource groups where potential partners with specific needs could look for matches; and mentorship of new partnerships by established ones whenever possible.

A **third recommendation**, closely related to the second, was the "**need to tell the partnership story better to all constituents, including funding agencies.**" The group felt that case studies on good partnerships, how-to models of linkage effectiveness, and similar published resources would be tremendously helpful. There was good sharing among individuals in the group about several unique and long-running partnerships, but most of those examples were until then relatively or completely unknown to others in the room. Again, better use of the Internet or other electronic databases seemed to resonate with most attendees.

At this point, ACE's international policy paper, "Beyond September 11: A Comprehensive National Policy on International Education" was highlighted. Specifically, conversation turned to the decrease in enrollments among some critical foreign languages. It was mentioned that only 5% of foreign language students ever enroll in languages spoken by 85% of the world. Several in the group stated that the trend toward shorter and shorter terms of study abroad is partially to blame; others said some study abroad -- however short -- was better than none. There was general agreement leading to the group's **fourth recommendation, that an "urgent need exists for faculty and student opportunities abroad in the Lesser Commonly Taught Languages"**. Some discussion that addressed meeting this need included promotion of study abroad (of varying lengths and substance); the use of distance technology to make language and cultural education available to students on all U.S. campuses, regardless of ability to physically travel; an increase in federal funding sources for such training and experience; and better dissemination of knowledge accumulated as a result of such faculty experiences.

Long discussion followed in relation to perceived decreases in federal funding for the seeding of substantive partnerships and linkages among institutions. Programs used as examples during this discussion included the UDLP, USAID, FIPSE, and programs within the U.S. Department of State. Included in the discussion of disappearing resources were related comments about a relative lack of flexibility in current proposal requests (i.e., FIPSE). Several individuals commented that the multiple partners required in order to submit good applications were overly restrictive in many cases. It was noted that some good programs still exist, but award few grants in comparison to the numbers of applications received. Professor Wiley commented that the Secretary of Education's commitment to partnerships was positive, but that the relative collapse of many of these resources raises critical issues for institutional partnership growth. Based on this discussion, "**Increasing the availability and flexibility of these and other resources for positive collaborations**" was the **fifth recommendation of this group**. It was mentioned and endorsed by several that words of support from the Department of Education to the Department of State toward these programs would be helpful.

Open discussion on the part of all participants dealt with several problems persistent in many partnerships. One major issue that had all present nodding in agreement was the "bombardment" of U.S. institutions by too many foreign institutions with numerous and varied offers of partnership. Avoiding pitfalls by making wrong choices, or ending up with too many "paper partnerships" were problems too many are familiar with. Related

issues generating good discussion surrounded the preservation of quality and academic integrity, shared degrees and curriculum, the vetting of degree programs, maintenance of standards, transfer of knowledge, etc. Professor Wiley commented that part of the reason for the increased numbers of partnership requests comes from the increasing privatization of higher education programs and institutions around the world.

This general area of conversation led to the group's **sixth recommendation: a need to assure academic quality and to maintain integrity in all collaborations.** Related to this recommendation, and following close behind it, was a **seventh recommendation: to identify strategies to maintain and grow good new partnerships.**

One idea mentioned to address these recommendations was to foster research clusters or focus groups on university campuses around central themes in order to establish multiple levels of activity within partnerships. Other campus strategies were to limit the numbers of partners to those where deeper relationships seemed more likely.

Nurturing campus champions who can be relied upon to verify outcomes and to add generational growth to the collaboration was mentioned more than once. Related to the champions notion was another concern: that assessing and rewarding a faculty member's investment -- time, emotional, and physical -- for promotion and tenure purposes is difficult. A reasonable formula for such investment is not in place at most institutions.

Several attendees mentioned that a narrower focus or theme for the partnership, or the completion of 'one successful project' with a particular partner often led to subsequent activities and a deepening of the relationship. The group also saw a need to limit misunderstandings among partners in collaborations, and talked about the necessity to establish ground rules early. Such rules would focus on the willingness between both/all partners to work through problems as well as shared commitment for all to achieve their own institutional goals within the collaboration.

Other ideas for increasing the integrity and substance of partnerships were to understand that an imbalance of capabilities and power between partners is likely, and to establish efficient ways to measure levels of success and increase accountability.

The importance of documenting, sharing, and publicizing strategies that work, partnerships that last, and keys to success was again reiterated.

Conversation about accountability led to other topics. Specifically, one person noted that the success or failure of institutional partnerships is often critical to "other university constituents", including accrediting agencies, alumni, advisory boards and councils, and smaller donors or other funding sources. How should these groups factor into decisions about partnerships? Questions arose about the appropriate federal agency for this type of mission.

One person commented that one possibility to deal with issues of power, capacity building, and transfer of knowledge was to "not call them partnerships at all. Call them 'service exchanges' and carry them out under short-term contracts or agreements."

Suggestions for appropriate places to "house" the core of programs whose mission is to foster institutional partnerships and collaborations followed, with Fulbright and a State program called the Alliance for Cultural Exchange specifically mentioned.

One individual mentioned a need for us to "turn things around" in order to make a better case to funding agencies and the government that such partnerships are advantageous to us (as U.S. institutions). He elaborated by saying that it's too easy to see what we can provide to our partners, but the learning we gain from them can be just as important. Professor Wiley commented that an emphasis on the efficiency of such knowledge gathering is important here.

Similar conversation continued along the lines of strengthening already-established partnerships. Several people commented that not-enough attention is paid to keeping good partnerships going, and that what resources are available are often earmarked for new programs. Retention of positive collaborations may be as or more important long-term than the creation of multiple new ones.

Finally, and leading to our last recommendation, was a brief discussion on the relationship between international linkages and partnerships and homeland security. Are they contradictory? One person said such partnerships *are an answer* to homeland security; that we are more secure when we know more about other cultures. "Building better partners makes more sense than building better fences," said one participant. The group's **eighth and final recommendation, therefore, was that there is a need to present international linkages and partnerships as *critical* to homeland security.** Sharing of knowledge accumulated during the partnership with all constituents vested in the projects (funding agencies, accrediting agencies, the corporate community, etc.) would help advance this notion.

In conclusion, the breakout session focused on institutional partnerships and linkages had these eight recommendations or needs:

- **the need to agree upon a definition of institutional linkages and partnerships suitable for the international education community**
- **the need for increased numbers of substantive, positive partnerships in international education**
- **the need to tell the partnership story better to all constituents, including funding agencies**
- **an urgent need for greater numbers of faculty and student participation in programs abroad focused on the Lesser Commonly Taught Languages**
- **a need to increase the availability and flexibility of funding and seed resources for positive collaborations and linkages**

- **a need to find ways to assure academic quality and to maintain integrity in all collaborations**
- **a need to identify strategies to strengthen and maintain the best partnerships**
- **a need to present international linkages and partnerships as *critical* to homeland security**