

Not So Clear Cut: What to Prioritize for Internationalization-at-Home

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Tags

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Setting

A large U.S. research university has turned to Internationalization at Home (IaH) initiatives to reach their students who do not study abroad. While they have 25,000 undergraduates, only 9% of them study abroad. To accomplish the university's internationalization goals, they must focus on IaH initiatives to reach the other 91% of students. IaH focuses on embedding global learning through the curriculum, campus events, and residential life and is another tool institutions may use to give students the intercultural competencies they need to be career ready for the global workforce. While not as well-known as education abroad, IaH initiatives have the potential to be more embedded across the institution with broader impact.

Case

William is the Senior International Officer with responsibility for comprehensive internationalization, including overseeing IaH initiatives. In many institutions, only a percentage of US students are able to study abroad. And yet, part of the mission of international programs offices and institutions is to prepare our students, all students, with global competencies for work in the global economy. Thus, internationalization-at-home initiatives are important to engage those students who are unable to go abroad.

Over the years, the portfolio has grown to include a range of programming that could be classified as intensive, medium-level, or basic-level in terms of its effect on participating students. Unfortunately, as the university faces budget cuts, William is tasked by the Provost with cutting the budget for internationalization-at-home

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initiatives by 30%. Considering the dilemma, William weighs which programs could be cut with the least negative impact.

Internationalization-at-home (IaH), as with all international education programming, involves the dedication of resources, including staff/faculty time and financial resources. IaH has been defined as "...the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Program offering decisions are often made based on how many participants a program engages, what type of effect the program has on the participants, and the cost benefit of the program, amongst other things. In addition, the programs must be evaluated for effectiveness. This implies then that staff must have the capacity and financial means to assess a program.

If one refers to all international education programming as part of a larger "Global Learning Ecosystem" (Gobbo & Hoff, 2020), then the effects of different programming can be categorized into three levels based on the depth of student learning:

- intensive-level global learning (e.g. collaborative on-line international learning (COIL));
- medium-level global learning (e.g. a residential program where international students and U.S. students live together, or a certificate program that involves co-curricular and possibly academic components); or
- basic-level global learning (e.g. globally-focused lecture series, international coffee hours where U.S. students meet international students, or a large cultural festival).

William must evaluate each IaH program on campus to make his decision. He will have to determine his primary assessment factors, such as attendance count and learning outcomes. He worries that some of the data may be unavailable or incomplete. In addition, William considers other aspects related to IaH programs such as the university's strategic plan, the mission of the office, available resources, institutional history and politics, and more. The decision weighs heavily on his mind.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- When considering budget cuts, which decision metrics are the most important? Quantity of participants, depth of learning, staff effort, program prestige that might lead to funding/donations, mission alignment, or other criteria?
- When considering budget cuts, is it important to keep programs that might engage faculty, for example, COIL programs?
- When considering budget cuts, should William prioritize preserving programs that have been a long-standing tradition on campus?
- When planning IaH, how can you customize internationalization efforts to the specific needs and makeup of the student population?

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- How can a university's mission statement and academic focus impact the direction of IaH efforts? For example, if you work at a liberal arts college versus a STEM-focused university, what programming would you emphasize?

References

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