

The Long and Short of It:

Operationalizing Short Term International Mobility at the Institution Level

Dr. (Prof.) Naveen Babu

Pro Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs, Chitkara University, Punjab, India

Email: Naveen.babu@chitkara.edu.in

Ms. Hazel Siromoni

Pro Vice Chancellor, Strategic Initiatives, Chitkara University, Punjab, India

Email: hazel.siromoni@chitkara.edu.in

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Setting

At a large research-based university in India, the Director of Global Initiatives learned from her students that a few weeks abroad can spark a lifetime of change, leaving a deep and lasting impact¹. She became convinced that the value of short-term mobility lies not in its duration, but in the transformation it inspires and shared the evidence of learning that she collected from students with the Vice President for Academics. The Director asserted that short-term programs should be viewed as an academically legitimate, credit-bearing component of a student's educational journey rather than treating short-term mobility as a peripheral enrichment activity, which had been the previous situation at the university. The Vice President tasked the Director to explore how

¹ See case "A Lifetime of Change: The Transformative Value of Short-Term International Mobility" in Case Studies in International Education, Issue 6(2) <https://csiepub.org/index.php/csie/article/view/211>

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the institution could responsibly, equitably, and credibly integrate these experiences into its formal academic structures.

Case

Very early on, the Director realized that implementing this change required engaging a broad range of stakeholders including the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of International Affairs, Deans, Heads of Departments, and the Examination Office. The Director arranged a series of meetings to discuss the topic and gather feedback. Faculty members played a critical role in defining academic and transfer equivalency standards, while administrative teams addressed procedural feasibility and compliance with national regulations.

In the initial stages of conversations, there was some opposition to the idea of a policy change. Concerns were raised around academic dilution, potentially uneven learning outcomes, and assessment integrity from short-term mobility. Questions arose about scalability and whether such experiences could be standardized across disciplines. The Director realized that to make the changes she envisioned, she would have to take into account all the feedback and work with colleagues across the institution through multiple discussions to develop a plan that would be agreeable to all stakeholders.

Establishing a Credit Framework for Short-Term Mobility

As the Director probed in the conversations to understand the sources of resistance, she came to realize that one of the core issues was that there are many types of short-term international programs and that they should not each earn the same amount of credit. Some perhaps should not earn credit at all. Once that was made explicit and agreed upon, a solution could be developed. The Director and stakeholders collaborated to articulate Academic Regulations and Ordinances for Outbound Student Mobility, a framework that explicitly defined multiple forms of international engagement including short-term programs, summer programs, semester exchanges, and international internships. One important point was ensuring there was a clear understanding of the difference between credit-bearing and non-credit bearing experiences while providing pathways for both to be acknowledged meaningfully.

For short-term mobility in particular, transparent credit calculation models became an important consideration. It was decided that credits would be awarded based on verifiable learning effort measured through contact hours, duration, assessments, and documented learning outcomes. Programs involving 30 to 60 hours of academic engagement would be eligible for one credit, with proportional increases for longer or more intensive experiences. When host institutions explicitly awarded credits, an equivalency formula was applied. The framework would also be periodically reviewed so that it could be updated as needed.

By co-designing this approach with stakeholders, the Director was able to reassure all faculty and administrators that the credit allocation was consistent, fair, and defensible, while remaining flexible enough to accommodate diverse international program structures.

Integrating Mobility into Degree Curricula and Advising

The Director was excited to have a framework in place for awarding credit, but wanted more than that. It was essential to her vision, and that of her allies, that short-term mobility would not be positioned as an “extra” but as an intentional component within degree pathways. She also wanted to focus on curricular integration and Learning Agreements became central to this process. The vision was that students would work closely with their faculty advisors and academic coordinators before their departure for their international mobility to map host institution coursework or internships to their home curriculum with the support of the Office of International Affairs.

The Director was pleased that the Office of International Affairs was willing to take on this additional advising and had the capacity for it. However, the advising demands on faculty and academic coordinators would also increase, and more coordination would be required. As a proactive measure, the Director worked with Academic Affairs to recalibrate how students considering short-term international mobility were advised. Based on the systems they developed together, students considering international internships or short-term programs were guided through structured counseling sessions that addressed their academic readiness, program competitiveness, financial planning, and career alignment. The university had to increase and improve communication between the academic departments, the Office of International Affairs and Office of Academic Affairs. Important steps which were adopted included: mandatory documentation of advising sessions; pre-departure orientations; and post-program feedback mechanisms. These measures further strengthened quality assurance. Students remained registered with the University during mobility, reinforcing academic continuity and institutional oversight.

Measuring Impact and Enhancing Global Standing

Having implemented the logistical and organizational changes necessary for this policy shift, the Director realized that there were still a few more important steps she could take to shift organizational culture and ensure that short-term international mobility programs were respected. The most important ingredient for success in this process was the recognition by the home university that there was institutional value in structured international mobility beyond the students’ own personal and academic journey.

The Director found that she could reinforce this idea by facilitating opportunities for faculty to learn first-hand about the positive impacts of internationalization. The alumni placement office shared compelling stories that short-term mobility contributed to enhanced graduate profiles which led to boost international collaborations and stronger global visibility. At the Director’s prompting, alumni outcomes, international partnerships, and participation data became part of institutional analytics supporting global ranking indicators related to internationalization, student diversity, and employability. Further, the formal documentation of credits through the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) framework in the Indian Education system ensured national and international portability, reinforcing the credibility of these experiences.

With these changes, the Director began to feel that the most significant outcome of the policy change at the institution level was cultural rather than procedural. Short-term international mobility began to be seen not as an exception, but an accessible entry point into global learning. As hoped, the Director observed that students who participated returned with renewed confidence, clearer academic direction, and an openness to further international engagement.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- In this case, what were the key concerns raised by stakeholders, when the proposed model was presented and how did it shape the final mobility framework?
- Did formalizing short-term international mobility as a credit-bearing academic component change its perceived value for students and faculty? How can you cultivate buy-in around the value of short-term international mobility?
- What are common issues with credit transfer and equivalency for international mobility programs? How can these issues be addressed?
- If you were developing a system to award credit for short-term international mobility programs, what criteria would you use to determine how much credit to award? How would you measure each criteria?
- What can be done to support the integration of international mobility into degree requirements? What are good practices for advising students on their options for international mobility within their degrees?
- How has the culture around international mobility evolved at your university?