



AIEA PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

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Creating Structures and Processes to Internationalize

Hugh F. Lena • *Providence College*

Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs





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Name: Hugh F. Lena

Title: Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs, Providence College

Time served as Provost: Ten years (as of July, 2014)

Providence College is primarily an undergraduate, liberal arts institution conducted under the auspices of the Dominican Order of Friars (Catholic).

Hugh Lena, who also holds a tenured full-professor position in sociology, has been at Providence College for 40 years. During the first 30 years, he taught courses in sociology, business, and the public and community service studies program. He is the author of a number of articles and editor of two books.



Given all of the demands and constraints facing higher education today, why did your institution decide to internationalize?

For many years, Providence College offered study abroad options to its students, even for a period, running an academic year program in Freiburg and a summer program in Pietrasanta, Italy. Despite this, the percentage of students studying abroad was minimal (111 students per year.) However, with the appointment of the current President and my appointment as Provost, a goal of 30% of our students studying abroad was set. I am pleased to report that we have reached that goal and now roughly 300 students out of a student body of 3,900 study abroad each year.

Has the role or importance of internationalization at your institution changed over the past five years? If so, how?

We had a small “study abroad” office for many, many years. When the former director retired and the part-time staff person left, I made a proposal to the President to create an office of international studies and increase participation in study abroad experiences (then thought of primarily in semester or year-abroad experiences) from 10% of our student body to 30%. The Office of International Studies was established just over five years ago, and as indicated above, we have reached our 30% study abroad goal. The mandate of the office has expanded, as has its staff and resources, over time. It now has a full-time staff of four and a part-time graduate assistant. Under the current OIS leadership, the quality of study abroad options has risen, the policies and procedures for study abroad have been improved, and assessment has taken place. We now have our own program, in collaboration with CEA, in Rome, Italy. The office has established policies and procedures around study abroad (waivers, permissions, applications, safety monitoring, etc); expanded training and opportunities for short-term international immersion experiences, and orientations for, and support of, undergraduate and graduate students from abroad. The primary impetus for this came from senior leadership but student/parent interest was always there.

In addition to study abroad, internationalization at Providence College involves, among other things, international students who come to us and courses we offer specifically to improve our students’ appreciation of, and proficiency in, cross-cultural matters. We have increased, but only minimally, the number of international students here. Unfortunately, the international exchange programs we have entered into have not been as successful as we had hoped in generating exchange students. However, we have added cross-cultural proficiency objectives to 90 courses in our Core Curriculum.



What were some of the main challenges you and your institution faced in pursuing internationalization? What are some of assets you and your institution drew on for this work?

In my judgment, there were three main barriers to study abroad. One was that students were not able to carry their institutional aid with them. Instead, they paid a nominal fee to the college to remain in full-time student status, and paid tuition directly to the host institution. Their institutional aid was then redistributed to students remaining on campus. Also, housing commitments were for a year here, and we held a very popular Junior Ring Weekend in the fall that students did not want to miss. Our solutions were to require students to pay home tuition and let students carry aid with them abroad, loosen the strictures on housing commitments, and move ring weekend to the fall of senior year. Growth in study abroad (both semester/year-long and briefer immersion trips) has necessitated additional hiring, increased fundraising efforts, and an increase in financial aid to support students remaining at PC to make up for the aid that was previously forfeited by study abroad students and redirected to students remaining on campus.

What is an example of an internationalization effort on your campus that was not completely successful? Why was that the case, and what did your institution learn from it?

Shifting over to admissions, we invested in student recruitment beyond the continental U.S., particularly in Puerto Rico and China, with the aim of diversifying the student body, not increasing the overall headcount. Unfortunately, a five- institution, three-year consortial arrangement to recruit in China did not result in any matriculations at Providence College. I'm not sure why it failed. Instead, we are now traveling to China on our own as part of a two-week swing through Asia. Also, without any specific recruitment strategies originally, we've received twelve students from Vietnam and eight from Nepal over a four year period. We found that exchange partnerships do not work for us. Although we can attract students from abroad, particularly from EU countries, our students are less interested in studying at our exchange partner institutions. This may be because the exchanges are discipline-based, and many of our students are hoping to satisfy core education distribution requirements when they study abroad rather than requirements for their majors.

Conversely, please discuss an example of an initiative that did work, and why.

We are starting our fourth year, in collaboration with CEA Rome, our program in theology and religious studies. It has turned out to be a popular program. We have always had students who wanted to study in Italy and, as indicated before,



we used to have a summer art program that we managed. The attraction now is that we have placed one of our faculty members in Rome, we hire additional adjunct faculty, and our students take courses that easily articulate with the Providence curriculum. The courses typically meet our core curriculum requirements and, in theology, are attractive alternatives to our classroom-based courses at home. It is one thing to study theology, it is quite another to study it two days a week and then visit related historical sites one day a week.

Who are the most important stakeholders you work with regarding internationalization at your institution?

Our partners abroad, donors, our course articulators across the departments, and the Offices of International Studies and Admission.

What are some of the key ways in which senior international officers can help individuals in your role advance internationalization at their institutions?

SIOs can help us “tell the story” of student transformation as a result of an international experience; by being available for potential donors to increase revenue streams to support study abroad; and by promulgating good practices and policies (particularly, risk assessment and management) for international experiences.



The **Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA)**, a membership organization formed in November 1982, is composed of institutional leaders engaged in advancing the international dimensions of higher education. The purposes of the Association are to:

- Provide an effective voice on significant issues within international education at all levels,
- Improve and promote international education programming and administration within institutions of higher education,
- Establish and maintain a professional network among international education institutional leaders,
- Cooperate in appropriate ways with other national and international groups having similar interests.

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