



AIEA PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

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Collaborations across the Institution for Internationalization

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Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs





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Time served as Provost: 4 years (as of August, 2014), previously Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

The University of North Texas (UNT) is a public research university located in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex (DFW) in Denton, a city with two major universities, and named Best Small Town in America by USA Today in 2013. UNT's 36,000 students include 7,000 at the graduate level and over 10,000 domestically and internationally diverse students. Notable alumni include Roy Orbison, Don Henley, Phyllis George, Nora Jones, and Larry McMurry (Lonesome Dove), as well as congressional representatives, CEOs and astronauts.

Dr. Burggren currently serves as Provost and VP for Academic Affairs and has robust international research interests in developmental physiology at the organ, system and organismal level. His global colleagues work on comparative animal physiology, particularly lower vertebrates and crustacean invertebrates; environmental and ecological physiology of intertidal, freshwater and marine ecosystems; and in the evolution of respiratory and cardiovascular systems. He was recently named Honorary Rector at the Universidad Automa de Estado de Mexico in Toluca. Dr. Burggren received his Ph.D. in Physiology from the University of East Anglia (1976) and a B.S. in Biology from the University of Calgary (1973).



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

The world is flat, as Thomas Friedman said. UNT actually didn't decide to internationalize, rather it woke up one morning and discovered it already had. At that point 7 years or so ago, the university upgraded the senior international officer (SIO) position from a director to Vice Provost, and began to leverage this change to advance the global within the teaching, service and research missions. Efforts so far have helped to attract quality students and faculty and to retain and graduate students.

Texas has had a tradition of immigration since the 1800s. Over the past ten years, 44% of new arrivals to the DFW area have been foreign born. Each year, UNT hosts Celebrating Great Global Citizens Month, a cooperative program between the Offices of Diversity, International Affairs, and Sustainability. This event highlights our global roots, and has become a symbolic occasion that suggests the institution and its communities recognize and “act” on their knowledge and shared interests. UNT also supports “ventanillas de la educacion” with the consulate of Mexico in Dallas to promote educational access and success.

A rather unique example of deliberate globalization on campus is the reorganization of UNT-International to embed research support. A dotted line was created that triangulates the offices of the Vice President for Research, the Provost, and the Vice Provost for International Affairs to act in a coordinated fashion to find additional sources of funding for creative work and to assist faculty and students desiring to conduct research abroad to successfully navigate and interpret cultural and language barriers. As a result, the Office of Global Engagement, which reports to the VP for International Affairs, now supports international research in addition to its recruitment, community engagement and international alumni functions.

UNT has long been known internationally for the strengths of its music program, but the strengths of its research programs have been less well known. Getting the word out about its research strengths is enhancing the campus's wherewithal to operate in global settings and with international partners. Research active faculty are four times more likely to be globally engaged according to Martin Finkelstein, Seton Hall. However, the international office and the office of the Vice President for Research had been “blind” to the complementarity of skills each office could bring to the table. Now that they are working together, we uncover more opportunities for global collaboration, improve the global research IQ of the university and find more opportunities for students to go abroad.



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

As mentioned, a short seven years ago, UNT elevated the international function from a director to a vice provost in academic affairs with access to multiple VP levels across the university. The change was made in recognition that higher education is flattening too, along with the world, with many more excellent options for students. There are also more opportunities for faculty collaboration to address global research challenges. In the next five years, global will be the source of most new student growth, more grants and contracts, and many more international faculty hires.

Language and culture remain primary obstacles to conducting joint teaching and research. At an institutional level, this means that UNT has had to infuse new “global” skills and knowledge of international affairs into not only academic areas, but also the functional areas of risk management, research, and finance. It has also had to build global competence in policy and legal matters; the list goes on. International Affairs at UNT has therefore become ever more pervasive in the fabric of the multiple functions of the university. It is not, and never should have been, a boutique program for a select few. Rather, it threads through the entire framework of the university.

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?

As is often the case with large public state universities, risk aversion and bureaucratic silos on campus are always a barrier. The academic, disciplinary structure still dominates and hinders interdisciplinary and global collaboration. Luckily, we have many advocates for the global agenda at the top of the administrative leadership structure.

Another barrier is the perception that international is about shifting resources out of the hands of domestic or Texas students, a zero sum game. UNT has many counter examples, such as the creation of win-win projects. The Great Global Citizens month events mentioned previously is one such project. We also review and “sunset” MOU’s to ensure that only active and relevant partnerships are nurtured. UNT-international’s communications team tells lots of stories that help show international (students, faculty and topics) as a great asset to the campus and community.

Another challenge was departmental/academic ethnocentrism, to be blunt: “If it’s not occurring in the United States, it’s not worth much.” Despite this, the



demand and enthusiasm for global from tenure track faculty was palpable. Junior faculty just needed an institutional “green light” to engage in global activities. The Provost, VPR, and International office therefore incentivized global collaboration as a means to quality scholarly work through “Global Start-Up” grants. These go to tenure track faculty to develop important relationships that help them publish and gain peer recognition. Promotion and tenure guidelines were also changed to include language on global activities. So, the tools and the guidelines for faculty and faculty supports have changed significantly over the past few years. As a result, UNT and its faculty have become more globally sophisticated.

Because of UNT’s creative spirit and strengths in both humanities (philosophy, journalism, music, arts) and in STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), UNT has a unique opportunity to leverage both for global opportunities. Many of UNT’s faculty were born outside the United States, which means their teaching and research perspective is likely international, they can shift between languages and cultures, and they bring with them the possibility of new and/or deeper international partnerships for UNT. Additionally, UNT programs in sustainability provide a common starting place to recognize diversity for its value to academic discourse, innovation, discovery and institutional success.

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?

Partnership strategies that have not succeeded were ill conceived and/or there was a failure to thoroughly vet both their cultural and business models. Further, when strategic educational, research or service objectives were not articulated in partnership agreements, this undermined the university’s capacity to make the partnerships work. It took several years to correct the perception that global was not a smart investment.

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

I’ll offer three of many successes: Opening the UNT Representative Office in Bangkok, Thailand; achieving 25% growth in study and research abroad over the past 3 years; and increases in globally focused grants resulting in a proportionate jump in globally focused research expenditures from 2% in 2008 to 9% in 2012.

Why did these initiatives work? They aligned with the major institutional objectives of growth in quality and number of international students, and helped



achieve major university missions such as improved retention and graduation, increased extramural funding and better alumni and town-gown relations. By acknowledging and acting on our global capacities, the university increased its prestige and reputation at home and abroad. More importantly however, these initiatives succeeded because they aligned with faculty interests and student needs and they engaged new constituencies (such as international chambers of commerce, recently immigrated diaspora communities), allowing the university to be seen in a positive, globally engaged light.

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

UNT-International works on multiple levels with multiple leadership units across campus for different aspects of the comprehensive globalization effort: The Alumni office for re-engaging alumni living outside the United States abroad, Finance and Administration to effect pro-global policies and procedures, Student Affairs to ensure that global issues find their way into extracurricular programming and Advancement, which helps UNT tap donors interested in supporting global programs and students.

The most influential stakeholders on campus in achieving the global mission are the Provost's office and the VP for Research. As UNT accelerates toward tier 1 status, this will only strengthen the presence and importance of global expertise in achieving this goal.

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

Help me solve my institution's problems, i.e. faculty productivity, growth in academic quality, budgetary pressures. Give me great stories to tell faculty, students, the community - and the university president to share with the Board of Regents and other important constituencies.

Is there anything else you would like to share with senior international officers or fellow chief academic officers?

SIO's have a difficult job, at the top of the middle of many institutions. From there, they must attempt to influence and cajole by reaching up, speaking to the top level institutional priorities, supporting the president with that office's multiple constituencies (Legislature, Board of Regents, Alumni and Community), and engaging the VPs with their unique parts of the institutional mission. Concurrently, SIOs must have strong grassroots appeal among faculty and students and must understand tenets of academic freedom and excellence in



education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels (and alternatively, what grates on these).

Finally, I would echo the words of a colleague, Peter Stearns, provost at George Mason until recently: “don’t be afraid to take risks” as long as these are directly connected to helping achieve an institution’s academic goals. We owe it to our students to be globally innovative. I thus expect my SIO to challenge the status quo and never settle for the unimaginative.



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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