



Globalizing the curriculum at Dickinson State University: Dual-Degree and International Internship Programs at the Department of Agriculture and Technical Studies

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Globalizing the undergraduate curriculum is increasingly important for Dickinson State University students who are seeking the opportunity to understand different culture, improve language skills, and learn more about international markets and international communities.

For the last couple of years, the issues of globalization and multicultural diversity have gained increasing attention in higher education as well as at DSU and the Department of Agriculture and Technical Studies in particular. As a result we established new relationships with China, England, Russia, Japan, Mexico and Kazakhstan. Two of the partnerships with Chinese and Russian institutions are particularly remarkable. In 2002, a dual degree program with 15 Chinese universities was developed. This program allows Chinese students who have completed one or two years of study at a participating Chinese university to attend Dickinson State University for a summer, two consecutive semesters and a concluding summer session and obtain two diplomas from the United States and Chinese higher education institutions.

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Why do we need to have a global perspective?

As we closer to developing a truly global economy, many people believe that it is becoming increasingly important to internationalize the curricula by integrating global ideas, problem solving issues, and understanding the relationships between broad international concepts in many scopes of the curricula. Akpan and Martin (1996) believe that with the rapid shrinking of our world, U.S. institutions cannot afford the consequences of failing to prepare their citizens for participation in world affairs.

Vickers's (2000) rationale for globalizing universities included that the model for today's universities must be one that educates students to be competent in their discipline and intentionally prepares them to successfully participate as world citizens in the global economy.

As the international community moves toward greater interdependence, globalization is driving a revolution in educational institutions. This transformation is being shaped by the demands to prepare labor for participation in the global economy and to prepare citizens to participate in the international polity (Torres, 2002).

Study abroad and Students Exchange programs are increasingly being seen by DSU students as a way to better understand culture, language, traditions and business opportunities in an international content (Desruisseaux, 1999).

Chinese exchange program

As many as 40 Chinese students could begin attending classes on the campus of Dickinson State University in the summer of 2002 following a series of exchange program agreements signed by President Lee Vickers his trip to China.

According to the partnership agreements with 13 different Chinese universities and the creation of a dual-degree program between Dickinson State University and the foreign schools, Chinese students have the opportunity to attend classes in their home country for one or two years, then come to Dickinson State University for a summer, two consecutive semesters, and another summer session. While in Dickinson, the students are able to enroll in a University Studies major. Students participating in the dual-degree program take 42 credits during their residency on campus, and an additional six credits of online work after returning to China. Students must return to China and complete their degree requirements at the Chinese university before receiving a degree from Dickinson State University. Students will also receive a degree from their home university.

—This will enable us to increase our efforts to provide a diverse learning environment, which is beneficial to all students,”—said Dr. Vickers. —It is another aspect of our effort to bring the world to Dickinson State University.

Chinese institutions that entered into partnership agreements with Dickinson State University for the dual-degree program include Beijing Polytechnic University, Lanzhou University, Anhui University, Central China Normal University, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Jimei University, Guangxi University, Nan Jing Normal University, Yibin University, Fuzhou University, Hubei University, Hubei University of Technology, and the Sichuan International Studies University.

Background of the International Internship Program in Russia

Global perspectives and attitudes toward cultural diversity among agriculture students were examined in this program.

During the past three years, Dickinson State University, in cooperation with Russian universities including Nizhniy Novgorod State agricultural Academy and Voronezh State University have conducted joint International Internship Programs. Ten Dickinson State University students and two professors took part and visited Russia for three weeks in June 2004. From Russian side, only four students took part in the program and spent six weeks on DSU campus. This first year program was considered as a pilot project and it went very well. Russian students had the opportunity to learn by participating in the program about the Western-life style and culture as well as observing the American Higher educational system and academic programs at DSU. American students learned more about Russia, Russian traditions, culture and religion. Russian students were introduced to the modern technologies of US Agriculture and learned about agribusinesses, trading and finance. DSU students visited Russian agricultural enterprises and studied the way of agricultural production in Former Soviet Union. Both American and Russian students saw the value of the partnership that they developed with their peers. Program designers delivered the program evaluation and indicated that joint programs like this can be effective in helping young people to bridge the cultural and professional gap between Russian and American students.

In order to improve the program and prepare DSU students for their trip to Russia a Basic Russian language class was offered first time in 2005. This course offers an introduction to the Russian language, developing the four basic communication skills of speaking, listening comprehension, reading, and writing.

In addition, students were introduced to cultural and social aspects of the Russian speaking world. By the end of this course, students were able to carry on basic conversations in Russian on many topics from their daily life and they able to introduce themselves in Russian.

In spring 2005 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Dickinson State University and Voronezh State and four students with their two instructors from Russia visited DSU campus for three weeks. Then nine American students and three instructors went to Russia and visited Voronezh for three weeks. DSU students learned a lot of culture from their Russian counterparts and they learned about themselves too. Their knowledge base of business and agriculture grew and their desire to gain more knowledge about Russia and Russian education increased. Russian instructors learned about US education and academic programs in DSU and they gained new teaching skills that they can use and directly apply in Russia. Both American and Russian participants learned about similarities and differences of the cultures, people and businesses.

Last year the program has been increased and in April of 2006 Dickinson State hosted eight students and two instructors from Voronezh State University. In return nine students and two instructors took Russian language class and made their three-week trip to Voronezh in May 2006.

Implications

Over the past several years, Dickinson State University has been busy living up to the goals as stated by President Dr. Vickers, putting together a strong programs which bring the world to Dickinson State, and gives students, faculty, and staff a chance to participate in the global community through exchange programs and partnerships with Universities in China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and England.

One of the missions of higher education for the future is to make students more globally aware and I believe we were successful in developing the important partnership programs with China that will enable us to better achieve that mission. One of the Chinese students Minmin Luo from Hangzhou, China stated:

Dickinson State University has offered me a great study environment and enriched my life experience. Students' lives here are combined with good quality education and all kinds of fun activities. The partnership program with DSU provided me a good opportunity to study abroad, challenge myself to handle various difficulties, and also broaden my

views about the world. Studying here is an enchanting, challenging, life-enriching experience. My year at DSU is an unforgettable journey that has overwhelmed my life.

Dickinson State University, Nizhniy Novgorod State Agricultural Academy and Voronezh State University have established a long-term cooperation and documented their interest and intention in Memorandums of Understanding in 2004 and 2005. A student exchange program was designed. In this program, students from Dickinson, Nizhniy Novgorod and Voronezh are given the opportunity to visit each other and spend up to two – three weeks at their partner's school and to live with the family of their exchange partner during the weekends.

Dickinson State University, Nizhniy Novgorod State Agricultural Academy and Voronezh State University sponsor this program. Departments of International Relations, VSU/NNSAA and Department of Agriculture and Technical Studies, DSU are responsible for all onsite coordination.

Participating students improve their linguistic proficiency in English and Russian, gain knowledge in International Agriculture, Trade and Business and become more familiar with a new culture and a new Higher Education system. The offered International Agriculture Internship program will grow through new challenges and become more efficient and useful. The increase in linguistic and cultural proficiency as well as personal growth can only be achieved in long-term exchange programs. Therefore students may explore the opportunity for long-term study at partner's institution. As Russian student Olesia Tkachenko indicated:

...participating in different student activities helped me to develop my English skills, make good friends, and better cope with homesickness. Studying here is an exciting, challenging, and enjoyable process. I believe studying at DSU is the perfect way to gain a lifetime experience and to grow as a person.

Conclusion

Both American and foreign universities are in a unique position to promote understanding, open-mindedness and informed dialogue regarding globalization. According to DSU President Vickers (2000), the complex 21st century geopolitical environment and global economy require a new paradigm for American colleges and universities. The model for today's universities must be one that educates students to be competent in their discipline and intentionally prepares them to successfully participate as world citizens in the global economy.

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