**Developing Research Partnerships in Emerging Nations:
Bridging the “North-South” Divide**

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Abstract

This article, which was built upon research linked to the development of sustainable study abroad programs in emerging nations, focuses on key challenges to true partnerships between universities in the “North” and “South.” The article begins with an analysis of challenges frequently experienced by universities from the “North” and “South” when attempting to develop an equitable partnership based on joint grants and/or research projects. It also includes a discussion of struggles experienced by faculty (also known as “academic staff”) at both universities who desire a more equitable relationship that will enhance the missions of both institutions.

Following this theoretical analysis, the study focused on one particular partnership between two universities from the “North” and the “South” (The University of Central Florida, USA, and the University of Botswana), during study abroad programs spanning five years and funded by the U.S. State Department (2012-2015) and the Fulbright-Hays Groups Project Abroad (2011). An analysis of this partnership is particularly relevant as it focuses on the initial steps, dialogues, perspectives and actions of both institutions as they worked through a host of preconceived notions on neocolonialism and the challenges of successfully operating by another’s “rules of engagement” within a dynamic

geopolitical platform.

Key Words: University Partnerships; Study Abroad Programs; “North”-“South” Collaboration

Introduction

As the process of globalization expands, collaborative relationships between institutions of higher learning worldwide cannot be ignored. Moreover, the goals of globalization and international partnerships can be valuable to home and host institutions alike. In most instances, the development of international partnerships are motivated by institutions in the “North” (a reference to developed nations) and “South” (a reference to emerging nations) to advance their academic interests and goals, and thus seek to develop the strongest, and most advantageous strategic alliances that support both globalization and the commodification of education (Nuffic, 2008). To this end, equitable and effective collaborative partnerships may be the best means to enhance quality research while improving educational standards across the “North-South” divide. Moreover, equitable and collaborative research programs enhance both the academic outputs and visibility of partners in the “South,” while building the capacity of the “North” to conduct relevant research in emerging nations (Gaillard, 1994). Moreover, as Angeles and Gurstein (2000) observe, while there are daunting pressures and demands on global economies in the “North,” these

pressures and demands are more extreme in the “South” due to deepening poverty, decay of public institutions, and less than efficient governance. These challenges make “North-South” relations both fragile and complex.

Within the advent of neoliberalism and globalization, Baker (2007) noted that there was a developing trend of skewed relationships within the “North” and the “South,” as evidenced by dispossession and negative distribution of resources which verifies the contention that globalization occurs from above. Moreover, Hurell and Sengupta (2012) have argued that as globalization becomes real and more transformational, it is vital that we anticipate a shift in the power dynamics between the “North” and the “South” and within the doctrine of global capitalism whereby all partners are supposed to have an equal voice in the socio-economic and political discourse. Within this changing framework “South-South” collaborative relationships are encouraged as it is expected that they are likely to yield more positive and balanced socio-economic and political returns. Of course, globalization advances the concept of the knowledge economy, which is essential to the academy and to institutions of higher learning in both the “North” and the “South.” To this end institutions should collaboratively join forces to develop mutually beneficial partnerships. Moreover, Biraimah and Jotia (2015) have observed that collaborative study abroad programs between institutions in

the “North” and “South,” while often faced with a plethora of challenges, should be encouraged as they can produce very positive inter-cultural learning experiences which transform participants’ worldview. Clearly, today’s global civil society has entered an era where even the spread of global liberal democracy cannot have boundaries as people are being mobilized worldwide to engage a transformative and diverse global economy (Mansbach and Taylor, 2012).

This article, which focuses on key challenges to true partnerships between universities in the “North” and “South,” applies these theoretical notions to actual field research on the development of sustainable study abroad programs in emerging nations for pre-service education students. The article begins with an analysis of challenges frequently experienced by universities from the “North” and “South” when attempting to develop an equitable partnership based on joint grants and/or research projects, including the struggles experienced by faculty (also known as “academic staff”) at both universities who desire a more equitable relationship that will enhance the missions of both institutions.

Following this theoretical analysis, the article focuses on one particular partnership between two universities from the “North” and the “South” (The University of Central Florida, USA, and the University of Botswana), during study abroad programs spanning five years and funded by the U.S. State Department (2012-2015) and the Fulbright-Hays Groups

Project Abroad (2011). The article analyzes the development of this partnership, including the struggles experienced by faculty at both universities who are working toward a more equitable relationship capable of enhancing the mission of both institutions. The first phase of this project is particularly relevant as it focuses on the initial steps, dialogues, perspectives and actions of both institutions as they work through a host of preconceived notions on neocolonialism and the challenges of successfully operating by another's "rules of engagement" within a dynamic geopolitical platform. Based on experiences and data collected during multiple study abroad programs in Botswana (2011-2015), this article examines the challenges facing universities from the North and South who wish to create collaborative partnerships linked to grants, research and publications.

Issues Linked to Equitable Partnerships between Institutions in the "North" and in the "South"

Unfortunately, even when universities from the North and South are cognizant of the challenges embedded within partnership, the path to developing a sustainable, quality programs, grants and the like that have the capacity to positively impact both partner universities is often obstructed by varying expectations and miscommunications. For example, Mihyo (2008) suggested that "North-South" institutional partnerships are often interpreted differently by those involved.

Drawing upon a partnership between a European university and universities in Namibia and Zimbabwe, Miho observed that the European counterparts were ready and eager to learn from their local African counterparts, yet these colleagues often took leave from their universities to pursue individual consultancies, and only participated in partnership activities when they knew they would receive additional pay funded by the project. While in this case the differentiated pattern of partnership participation may have been exacerbated by drastically different levels of faculty remuneration in Europe and Africa, other factors stemming from the host university's need to meet increasing demands for access to higher education with limited infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a shortage of qualified faculty have added to this conundrum (Woolf, 2006). The socio-economic disparity of the universities obviously exacerbates these challenges.

In order to overcome these challenges, Wohlgemuth and Olsson (2003) advise that dialogue, rather than domination, be promoted among the partners, and that such an approach encourage the development of shared values. Moreover, the rationale behind "North-South" partnerships according to King (2008) should not only focus on capacity shortfalls in the "South," but should also be seen as promoting learning and capacity building in the "North."

Moreover, if partnership programs focus on capacity building and the development of mutual trust, Angeles and Gurstein

(2000) posit that “capacity development would benefit immensely from the use of a participatory development approach which entails investing time in trust-building activities, and the dissemination of good and complete information to guide participation” (p. 58). However, while “capacity building” is often taunted as a key outcome of international partnerships, including study abroad programs, the “power relationships (based on inequitable wealth) may become a significant barrier to communication and immersion,” and may inhibit positive outcomes normally expected of SAPs (Woolf, 2006, p. 142).

While shared programs and courses, such as study abroad projects at emerging universities may provide a limited number of host institution faculty members with extra income and opportunities to engage in research/publication activities with faculty from the “North,” it is questionable whether they provide a sustained, positive impact focused on the professional development of host university faculty or programs. Moreover, to attract hard currency revenues from abroad, emerging universities may find themselves functioning as little more than travel agents, requiring their academic and clerical staff to meet the needs of international colleagues and participants before attending to their own programmatic and student issues; all in hopes of attaining new, sustainable revenue sources. Such a scenario reflects the challenge posed when two partners wish to move forward

with a symbiotic relationship, yet have significantly different economic resources.

Do No Harm. A review of the literature also reveals additional negative outcomes that may occur when international partnership programs are based in emerging host communities and institutions. Schroeder et al (2009) explored these challenges more deeply in an aptly named article, *First, do no harm: Ideas for mitigating negative community impacts of short-term study abroad*. While focused on study abroad programs in emerging nations, they implored all participants in international partnerships to reflect upon a myriad of “unexamined and unintended consequences for host communities” in emerging nations (p.141). For example, there is always the risk that Northerners will flaunt their “first world” wealth and dominance over local communities and institutions, though this potential threat pales in view of even greater threats to a host nation’s environment, economy and cultures. Moreover, Schroeder et al suggest that 1) limited local resources may be allocated to support international programs while imposing hardships on local inhabitants; 2) the financial impact on local economies may be to extend economic inequalities if only the local “elites” benefit; and 3) international programs based in emerging nations may contribute to increased dependency as local economies begin to depend on outside funding.

Interestingly, we often find that these issues have

been explored in depth, not in education literature, but rather in publications focused on the tourism industry. This is unfortunate as the envisioned programs, in partnership with an emerging host institution, may have an even greater potential for damaging the host's economy, society, and culture. (See Archer, Cooper, and Ruhanen, 2005; McLaren, 2006). In particular, when focusing on partnerships designed to promote study abroad programs, it is possible "...that even more than most tourism, study abroad is by its very nature...attracted to unique and fragile environments and societies and...in some cases the economic benefits [to host communities] may be offset by adverse and previously unmeasured environmental and social consequences" (Archer, Cooper and Ruhanen, p. 79).

To further examine these theoretical notions about the development of equitable partnerships between institutions in the "North" and "South," this article now shifts to focus on one particular partnership between an institution in the "North," (the University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida, USA) and an institution in the "South," (the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana). And while the authors of this study are convinced of the overall value of these partnerships, they are also cognizant of the significant challenges that impede progress towards this end.

Methodology and Data Sources.

This study is based on a comprehensive and extended review of pertinent literature focused on the development of equitable partnerships between institutions in the developed and emerging worlds, and an analysis of the sustained partnership between the University of Botswana (UB) and the University of Central Florida (UCF). It is based on shared experiences within a 2011 Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad in Botswana and a three-year U.S. Department of State Grant, *Capacity Building Program for U.S. Undergraduate Study Abroad*, awarded to UCF and UB in August 2012 and continuing through 2015. Data were collected from agendas, meeting notes, budgets, and interviews designed to measure collaborative planning efforts, and tested using qualitative analyses of the content of participant responses, program documents, and interview transcripts. As this was not a quantitative analysis, it was not appropriate to apply univariate statistics such as frequency distributions or percentage analyses. It is anticipated that the results of this longitudinal study will help program leadership more clearly understand factors that mediate the successful outcomes of this and future collaborative projects between the “North” and “South,” while helping to develop and nurture mutual partnerships.

The Partnership between the University of Central Florida (UCF) and the University of Botswana (UB): An Analysis of a “One-Way” Study Abroad Program

The remainder of this study will focus specifically on the partnership between UCF and UB, and the various challenges and financial hurdles that participants from both institutions addressed in order to ensure that this potentially enriching partnership might continue and flourish.

Two Initial Challenges

Strain on the Local Infrastructure. While short-term study abroad programs are normally scheduled during vacation periods at host institutions (which may help to reduce the strain on limited infrastructure, including dormitory and classroom space), greater consideration is needed when these programs occur during normal academic sessions. For example: 1) Are the university’s broadband capabilities stressed by these added students; and 2) Are local students denied suitable accommodation if administrators prioritize housing for study abroad students in order to obtain higher fees? (Refer to Schroeder et al, 2009.)

Distracting Host University Faculty from Primary Academic Responsibilities. Often the desire by host institution faculty participating in international partnerships and programs to earn additional salary can effectively limit their expected involvement in teaching and academic duties at

home. And, given the usually high faculty/student ratios in many emerging universities, this can negatively impact the quality of programs and instruction. Moreover, even when these programs occur during vacation periods, host institution faculty often come to the challenging realization that they have insufficient time left to devote to career advancement activities including research, publications, and grant proposal writing.

Addressing the Challenges of Infrastructure Strain and Academic Responsibilities: Fortunately, these challenges can be mediated in two ways. First, whenever possible, study abroad programs should be scheduled during a host university's long vacation periods. Second, these programs should offer meaningful opportunities for both home and host institution faculty to engage in collaborative research and publication activities. For example, the 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015 projects in Botswana were scheduled during May, June and/or July, months when most the University of Botswana students were on vacation. Moreover, faculty from both partnership institutions successfully engaged in numerous scholarly activities, resulting in joint conference paper presentations {Comparative and International Society Annual Conference in San Juan (2012), New Orleans (2013), and Toronto (2014); the Southern Africa Comparative and History of Education Annual Conference in Durban, South Africa (2014); the International Symposium on Comparative

Sciences in Sofia, Bulgaria (2013); and the Annual Conference of the International Society for the Social Studies in Orlando (2014)} and a recently published article in the *Journal of Studies in International Education* (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013).

Additional Challenges to Equitable and Collaborative Partnerships between Institutions in the “North” and “South”

Beyond the above logistical impediments, however, remain numerous challenges to establishing a truly collegial, collaborative and reciprocal partnership between institutions in the “North” and “South.” And while multiple grants and study abroad projects such as those in Botswana provide enticing possibilities for “capacity building” (as defined from a “Northern” perspective), the final impact may vary from original expectations due to a plethora of issues linked to the “human condition.”

Challenges to Building a Consensus Document.

While grant *Requests for Proposals* (RFPs) may appear to provide clear direction and definition, proposal development and program implementation can produce an alternate reality. Due to heavy teaching and service loads, and a perceived lack of project ownership, faculty from the “South” may not identify initial proposal development as a key responsibility, as do their colleagues from the “North.” For example, the UB faculty team did not engage in systematic critical

editing of a grant narrative linked to proposed study abroad programs (2012–2015), though they did provide succinct edits related to a description of their institution. Moreover, voiced disappointments regarding the lack of reciprocity once the proposal was funded suggested that the UB team had envisioned a program which varied significantly from the final proposal, which strictly observed RFP guidelines.

The *Capacity Building Program for U.S. Undergraduate Study Abroad* RFP clearly focused on the development of a study abroad program for American undergraduates, leaving no possibility for funding a reciprocal study abroad program for UB students. Though planning activities for a future reciprocal program were built into the final year of the grant, disappointment that UB students were not included in a significant and equitable manner remained. When UCF received notification from the U.S. State Department that the proposal was funded, it was necessary to resend the official RFP to the UB faculty to further clarify grant guidelines. It should be noted, however, that the UB team, under the leadership of the Faculty of Education's Dean, agreed to fully honor the grant's guidelines and their institutional responsibilities. Clearly, in hindsight it would have been advisable to remove the word "reciprocal" from the proposal's title to avoid such misunderstandings.

Moving beyond initial grant guidelines focusing on the development of programs for U.S. students in Botswana,

UCF and UB faculty amended the program to include two UB education majors (selected by the UB team), who would receive stipends to serve as “cultural informants” for UCF program participants. These UB cultural informants were responsible for mediating the experiences of UCF participants, both during orientation sessions held at UB, and later in extended service-learning experiences in Remote Area Dwellers’ Schools (RADs) and villages.

To further ameliorate this lack of true reciprocity, a member of UCF’s team offered his home to two UB education majors once they arrived in the U.S. (assuming UCF’s student social service clubs could cover the cost of the students’ airline tickets through numerous fund-raising events). While the UCF team realized that this was not equitable reciprocity, they did hope that it would serve to demonstrate “good faith” with regard to a desire to develop a truly reciprocal program. It should be noted that both teams continue to search for grants and foundation funding opportunities that might help provide a more balanced and reciprocal study abroad program, though they acknowledge that most nationally funded grants focus on programs designed to enrich study abroad experiences for their own citizens/students. The above scenario reveals a thorny reality that global “North-South” relationships, even in institutions of higher learning, will remain skewed due to unequal economic bases. In the case of the UCF/UBs partnership, the University of Botswana staff concluded that

they were again being awarded a grant which did not benefit them to the same degree as their “Northern” partner.

Different Perceptions of “Adequate” Pre-Planning.

In October 2012 (at the beginning of the State Department grant), the UCF team arrived in Botswana with an extensive agenda for the first formal planning session (previously shared with UB faculty for editing and input). Nonetheless, conceptualizations regarding key issues to be discussed remained varied. While extensive planning time had been identified well before UCF faculty arrived in Botswana, the actually “time on task” shrunk from an anticipated week of detailed discussions to more infrequent and briefer sessions where only basic program implementation was addressed. While key program decisions were reached during these initial meetings, more “detail oriented issues” such as orientation schedules, academic agendas, and the future development of a team-taught online course were neglected.

Clearly, the “agenda,” as envisioned by UCF’s team had been transformed and minimalized, with only the most essential decisions reached during their on-sight planning trip. In reflection, UCF probably expected too much too soon, while the UB team appeared to believe that all necessary key decisions had been reached. It must be added, however, that at times the UCF team simply did not understand the cultural ramifications and approaches necessary to secure desired end results and a workable partnership with multiple

Remote Area Dwellers (RAD) schools. For example, what was later explained to the UCF team by their Botswana counterparts (who were cognizant of the American desires for rapid results), negotiations of this nature required the personal touch – which translated into multiple, long and relatively uncomfortable road trips to these remote sites by their UB colleagues in order to secure the desired agreements. A clear “lesson learned” by UCF team members that cultural accommodations were necessary at all levels to create successful study abroad programs. There is no doubt that this key element was ignored during the initial planning stages of the program, even though it was a fundamentally crucial aspect in building an equitable partnership.

Varying Perspectives on Timeliness and Detailed Planning. While a neutral middle-ground with regard to priorities and timeliness would have facilitated planning, this was perhaps an unattainable goal given the differing perspectives on what constituted prioritized issues and appropriate time lines. And even though many faculty members from emerging universities have extensive experiences in, and often terminal degrees from institutions in the “North,” their American counterparts should not assume that faculty teams from the “North” and “South” necessarily share their values and perspectives.

Unfortunately, this difference in acceptable levels of detailed planning persisted after the UCF team returned

to Florida, and continued to cause misunderstandings and angst on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, logistical issues surrounding the development of plans for extended immersion experiences in RAD communities continued to demonstrate the divergent perceptions and expectations of faculty from UCF and UB. During initial planning sessions held at UB in October 2012, it was agreed that students and faculty would be divided between two RAD schools. However, UB expanded these two sites to three, without consultation with their American colleagues. The UCF team found out about this change through a brief email listing the names of three schools. When UCF's project manager pressed her UB counterparts for the schools' locations, she was informed that a school's name was also the community's name (which turned out to be perfectly true, though UCF's search engines could not locate two of the three communities). Pleas for additional information regarding the size of the communities and their capacity to house participants in homestays and/or public lodging (key data that would drive a final budget), remained unanswered well into the new year. Clearly, until all locations were identified, it would be impossible to develop a final budget – which in turn would dictate the length of the final study abroad program, itineraries, and international airline reservations. Unfortunately, the high level of angst felt by UCF team members may have occurred through misperceptions regarding acceptable patterns of communications.

In retrospect, the UB team perceived their UCF partners as demanding information “at the speed of thunder” (UB’s term), without taking into account the communication problems that existed with the three remote localities; especially at the primary school sites. Search engine technology, so easily accessible in the “North,” was not as effective in Botswana’s marginalized rural communities. Moreover, key logistical information often required UB faculty members to undertake extended travel on rough gravel roads while their UCF counterparts waited impatiently for their unanswered phone calls to be returned.

Financial Hurdles

US Government Grants and Perceived Status Differentiation. Though universities in the “South” may receive a share of the budget, U.S. federal grant requirements usually stipulate that an American institution “will control” the budget, clearly leaving their “partners” in dependent roles. In our case, UB was included in the development of grant narratives and budgets, but UCF remained the “lead institution.” Moreover, as substantial amounts of funding came directly from participant fees, financial controls fell even more solidly into UCF’s hands. While UB was allocated funds through a mutually agreed upon sub-contract (covering local expenses such as dormitories, guides, and faculty honorariums), the reimbursable nature of this grant precluded

UB from managing substantial portions of the grant's budget (and from the benefits of lucrative overhead revenues). For example, the current grant from the U.S. State Department was initially designed for most expenditures, except international airfares, to occur within Botswana. Yet UB's current sub-contract accounts for only 11% of total federal funds, as a lack of sufficient cash reserves kept them from a greater share of the grant's 26% overhead rate, a significant revenue which will now go to UCF. The old adage, "it takes money to make money" appears to apply in this instance.

Dueling Accountants. Even when grant funds have been allocated in an equitable manner, other factors may keep "partner" universities on unequal terms, or mired in complex and competing accounting procedures. In most cases, universities from both the "North" and "South" have well established, yet often very different accounting and auditing procedures, and are rarely allowed by their institutions to deviate from these established guidelines. For example, there were often significant differences regarding what constituted sufficient "due diligence" with regard to receipts, currency conversions and auditors' expectations. And these varied accounting procedures easily translated into thousands of U.S. dollars gained or lost by the respective institutions. For example, the designation of exchange rates, as well as the official day for the exchange rate to be calculated, significantly impacted our budget's "bottom line" by several thousand U.S.

dollars.

It should be noted that these accounting challenges led to a substantial delay before UB finally received funds from UCF, as designated in their mutually agreed upon sub-contract. For example, though UCF students departed Botswana in early June, it was not until mid-September of that same year that funds were finally received by UB, a full three months “after the fact,” (a delay involving endless email exchanges, invoicing, disagreements on exchange rates and inaccurate banking information). Given the fact that host institutions in the “South” often have limited resources, such delays and frustrations may place these institutions in a dire financial position. Bradley (2008) contends that asymmetrical relationships between “North-South” partners are key obstacles to productive and collaborative research, and that this asymmetry manifests itself in terms of inequitable access to information, training, funding, conferences, publishing opportunities, and the disproportionate influence of “Northern” partners in project administration, budget management, and the development of research agendas (p. 27).

Concluding Comments

While it was not the purpose of this study to systematically judge the effectiveness of a particular partnership (in this case that of UCF and UB), its primary goals remain the identification of critical attitudes and perspectives that have the potential to significantly damage even the most carefully designed programs to successfully bridge the "North-South" divide. Clearly, to develop equitable and productive relationships that endure this study underscores the need to operationalize the most effective approaches to identify and analyze key opportunities, challenges and dilemmas directly linked to quality partnerships which include programs based in emerging nations. To develop a workable consensus and long-term commitments between institutions and communities, as well as enhancing a program's end products, there is a critical need for all partners to maintain continuous formal institutional reviews that include all stakeholders. Moreover, "North-South" collaborative partnerships could also be enhanced by designing programs that are not only more beneficial to the host institutions and communities, but include them as meaningful stakeholders; thus providing an effective platform for transformative-learning experiences for all involved.

In addition, programs should also encourage more effective communication and coping skills for all participants. To this end, there is a need for institutions from the "North"

to eradicate any “missionary zeal” embedded within their programs, as they are not messiahs who can liberate the “South” from its assumed miseries. For example, the shared design of study abroad programs should include meaningful service-learning projects where all stakeholders gain from the experience. Such service-learning initiatives should be continuously documented through journals, daily reflections and frequent debriefings (Schroeder et al, 2009).

In conclusion, there must be transparent and mutually agreed upon “terms of engagement” regarding the development, management and evaluation of project proposals, budgets, and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU). This will (hopefully) avoid situations where institutions from the “South” are cast in dependent roles, while their partners from the “North” maintain control of most, if not all of the project funding. Such apparent (if not real) inequities compromise the goal of mutual capacity building, a key element in “North-South” collaborative partnerships.

Clearly, the goal of developing and enriching human resources, while providing opportunities to reap the rewards of a strong, equitable, and truly collaborative partnership, cannot be compromised by perceived (or real) inequitable relationships. Moreover, if we are to conceptualize and operationalize a form of globalization capable of enriching all stakeholders worldwide, it is imperative that we begin by reaffirming partnerships between the “North” and “South”

that are truly equitable and collaborative, while recognizing the unique and invaluable qualities and strengths of all stakeholders.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences encountered as UCF and UB struggled to establish a meaningful and equitable partnership over the past few years, the following suggestions are provided for institutions in the “North” and “South” who are considering the development of a successful and mutually rewarding partnership:

1) Effective approaches for analyzing the opportunities, challenges, and dilemmas of developing partnerships and programs include:

- a) The need to acknowledge and address potential problems by both institutions;
- b) The provision for continuous and formal institutional reviews of all partnership programs;
- c) The involvement of faculty who are knowledgeable of their partner’s institution, community and country;
- d) The development of long-term commitments to the

partner institution and country; and

e) The shared development of meaningful program objectives and activities.

2) Suggested guidelines for establishing a more collaborative, reciprocal and equitable partnership between universities from the “North” and “South” include:

a) A clear understanding by all stakeholders of the limited focus of most grants, such as those designed to support study abroad programs;

b) The involvement of team members from both institutions in the meaningful development, management and evaluation of project proposals, budgets, Memorandums of Understand and the like;

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