

**The 2009 Senator Paul Simon Award for Campus Internationalization:  
Nomination Essay Submitted by Portland State University, Portland, Oregon  
- Awarded 10 March 2009 -**

Established in 1946, Portland State University (PSU) is characterized by a historical commitment to international education and more recent recognition for its innovative approach to comprehensive internationalization of the campus. The question of what works for our students—older, part time and predominately place bound—is not only what makes our story distinctive, it illustrates how universities like PSU now develop new models of international learning for non-traditional students.

The elements of our story are the focus of Karin Fisher’s article, “‘Flat World’ Lessons for Real-World Students,” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Nov. 2, 2007). She notes:

“Portland State University has certain hopes for its students. They will learn to function well in a multilingual and multicultural environment....understand the world beyond America's borders....gain the confidence to work with people and institutions in other countries. ... And....develop those skills without having to leave Portland's city limits.”

Fischer exaggerates somewhat—PSU does send an increasing number of students abroad—but she had good reason to start this way: many US institutions struggle with the difficulty of assuring that their students develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills associated with international experience, despite the fact that those students are part of a “new majority” (older, part-time, and/or minority students) and thus likely to be much more place bound than the 18-21 year-olds at a typical liberal arts college. PSU takes pride in its efforts to bring internationalization to a campus comprised of this new majority.

A Young Institution’s Historical Commitment to Addressing International Education

Many of PSU’s international programs began shortly after its creation immediately following WWII. The Middle East Studies Center is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2009. For 40 years, our students have participated in study abroad programs organized by PSU and the Oregon University System. We have steadily increased the range of courses with international content, research on international subjects, and study abroad courses and internships. These include teaching exchanges through the Northwest Council on Study Abroad and Fulbright (in 2007-08, five faculty and four students were awarded Fulbrights to: Argentina, China, Israel, Ghana, The Netherlands Sarajevo, Sri Lanka, Sweden, and Trinidad/ Tobago (<http://oia.pdx.edu/OIA/newsletters/newsletter08.pdf>)). Our International Visiting Professors program, which brings 12 to 15 international academics to campus every Summer to teach about their respective countries through the *Tour the World at Home Program*, is 30 years old. The University’s International Studies Program, an interdisciplinary approach that includes area and thematic foci, celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

Planning and Strategic Thinking: Critical Elements Leading to Deepened Understanding of Student Needs

PSU’s sheer range of activity does not constitute a strategy, nor does activity connote that we are satisfied with how we are addressing the central international education challenges facing young, urban universities like ours. It is the question of strategy for comprehensive

internationalization that led to internal stock taking that distinguishes the last decade of PSU's international education history. In 1999, former President Daniel Bernstine designated internationalization as one of four presidential initiatives. In 2002, a new Internationalization Action Council (IAC) was charged with designing a strategy for internationalization and granted an average annual operating budget of \$40,000. The majority of this budget focuses on 'mini-internationalization grants' that encourage faculty to incorporate global learning into their curricula, including such rich topics as: "Service-Learning in India"; "Sustainable Development in Rural Argentina"; "Himalayan Field Studies"; and "Community Development in Africa" (these awards went to faculty in Graduate Education, Arts and Sciences, and Urban and Public Affairs). The IAC also developed five goals for internationalization, focusing on: students, faculty, staff, community, and alumni. ([www.president.pdx.edu/Initiatives/international/intlgoals.phtml](http://www.president.pdx.edu/Initiatives/international/intlgoals.phtml))

Accepting NASULGC's Michael P. Malone Award in 2005, President Berstine observed:

PSU has had strong international student enrollment, partnerships with international universities, and a focus on area studies, particularly the Middle East. However, for many PSU students, their exposure to international cultures and customs has come largely from studying with international students, through coursework that emphasizes an international perspective, and working with faculty who have a passion for connecting theory to the world.... Our initiative is applicable to other institutions, but it is the emphasis on meeting the needs of place-bound and nontraditional students that, I believe, sets us apart. It is that emphasis that also challenges each of us to think creatively....about ways to reach our students and connect them with the world—at a time when they are struggling to pay bills, finish programs, maintain jobs, and....be contributing members of their community.

#### An International Education Agenda for Non-traditional Students

Measured by the 2007-08 academic year, PSU has slightly under 25,000 students; we are Oregon's largest (and most diverse) university—and its only urban campus. Of these students, 50 percent are adult learners, 43 percent are part time, and 23 percent are minority students. Their average age is 27.1 (undergraduates average 25.2). This demographic profile is of people who cannot easily participate in traditional study abroad programs, leaving jobs and families behind. How does one meet the needs of these 'new majority students'?

This question, "What works for *our* students?" motivated us to apply and be invited to participate in the American Council on Education's (ACE) *Global Learning for All* (GLA) project. <http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/current/past/GLAMain.htm> As ACE describes the project on its web site:

Institutions serving high numbers of minority, adult, and part-time students are providing examples of good practice in setting international learning goals, reviewing their internationalization activities, aligning international activities with learning goals, partnering between institutions, and developing strategic internationalization plans that best serve their constituents.

It was this point, with a strategic plan and draft learning goals in hand, that we became aware of the contributions we could well make to addressing the comprehensive internationalization needs

of our institution, and others, thanks to frequent interaction with the seven institutions selected, conference calls, meetings, and site visits. In ACE's final site visit (2006), PSU's strengths were commended as follows:

- Internationalization... is well on the way to being institutionalized at PSU (with) deep roots and broad acceptance....
- There is widespread enthusiasm and interest in internationalization among faculty and staff (for example: 27 internationalization mini-grant applications submitted 2005-06; the spontaneous emergence of a Committee on International Recruitment and Retention....
- The involvement of a few key figures . . . (serve) as the nexus (for creating a) ...structure (and) ensure continuity.
- ....the campus climate has allowed PSU to grapple with the complex issue of how internationalization and multicultural education intersect in an open and cordial manner.

The GLA project and its leadership feedback further assisted PSU in identifying areas for additional work. The project concluded that IAC needed to be institutionalized (accomplished during 2007-08); urged completion of work on articulating global learning outcomes (the addition of this goal to meet general education requirements goes before the Faculty Senate in December 2008); recommended thinking through of the relationship between international students and internationalization (PSU inaugurated an international student mentoring program in 2007); and recommended bolder steps to engage more faculty in discussion of comprehensive internationalization (a priority focus of the Internationalization Council this academic year).

#### New Approaches to Education Abroad and International Curriculum Development at Home

While participation in GLA helped develop PSU's nascent infrastructure, it has been most valuable in identifying programmatic and curricular areas appropriate to our students: short-term, faculty-led international programs; the curriculum itself; and increased interaction of domestic and international students through curricular and co-curricular activities (particularly given that international student enrollment has more than doubled over the past decade, to 1750).

A point of special, though challenging, accomplishment has been the rapid development of our short-term, faculty-led (STFL) programs, typically of two to three week duration. In 2007, we conducted 18 programs in 13 countries; this year we project 23 programs, in 15 countries (Belize, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, France, Ghana, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Nicaragua, South Korea, Spain, Vietnam). Since 2003, there has been a 44 percent increase per year in STFLs and they now attract half of all students participating in study abroad, a clear indicator that PSU is meeting student needs. At the same time, to grow this quickly represents a significant challenge given the labor-intensive characteristics of such programs. We overcame this obstacle in 2008 by adding a second full-time staff member to focus exclusively on developing and organizing STFLs.

STFLs have had to address content questions, as well, particularly concerns among faculty about how short-term programs do and do not differ from longer-duration traditional study abroad programs. PSU has been able to address best practices for acquisition of international knowledge, attitudes and skills through participation, with six other institutions, in an ACE/ FIPSE project, *Assessing International Learning*

[http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/res/assess/project\\_bckround.htm](http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/res/assess/project_bckround.htm). This project honed our understanding of distinctions between unstructured international travel and study experience abroad and structured and reflective academic experiences that are built into the STFL programs. A further application of our assessment findings is their incorporation into the curricular format of on-campus undergraduate International Studies as well as General Education courses. The FIPSE project's finding will also be integrated into PSU's recent award of a DOE 'Russian Flagship Program', with the goal of producing superior speakers of Russian with majors in any discipline (an example of our work on Culture and Language across the Curriculum). PSU's Office of Institutional Research and Planning has assisted in formulating unique instruments for assessing the educational impact of STFLs, and the on-campus curriculum, and we are invited contributors to a forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Education*.

#### Community Engagement and Internationalization: Frontiers Near at Home and Far Away

The University's motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City", is highly visible on a sky bridge that crosses downtown Portland's main street, in the center of the PSU campus. Such commitment figures prominently in PSU's internationalization efforts, specifically its approach to student engagement and community outreach.

The Middle East Studies Center (MESC) makes a significant contribution to linking campus to community through its community-based advisory boards, and a wide-ranging outreach program. In 2003, MESC was awarded a PSU Civic Engagement award for its efforts. In the past year, MESC collaborated with more than 20 community organizations and 12 campus units in offering 41 outreach events. These included lectures, art exhibits, workshops for K-12 teachers, cultural festivals, film showings, theatrical productions, and concerts. In addition, MESC referred 30 international student and faculty members to speak in community and school settings, arranged media interviews, and loaned materials through its resource library. A critical educational aspect of this work is the involvement of PSU study abroad returnees, international students from the region, and community volunteers. MESC is also integral to PSU's focus on alumni in the Middle East, in hopes of developing a model for reaching international alumni elsewhere. PSU has more than 2000 graduates in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and has sought to reconnect with them; the 2008 PSU reunion reflected multifaceted internationalization efforts, occurring in conjunction with the swearing in ceremony of PSU alumnus Joseph LeBaron, newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Qatar.

Finally, as PSU looks forward, the University's extensive expertise in community-based learning and research is an area of leadership that can be advanced by the internationalization initiative. PSU places more than 8,200 students in community-university partnerships each year in over 400 community-based learning courses, with close to 1,000 government, non-profit and business partners annually. For the local-to-global dimensions of engagement, see: Portland State Partnership Map <http://partner.pdx.edu/world>. The most recent of PSU's many awards for community engagement is the 2008 U.S. National Carter Foundation Partnership Award, focusing on a community watershed program (<http://www.pdx.edu/news/20547/>) A feature of the watershed project is the transfer of lessons learned to Vietnam, site of an increasing number of University curricular activities, for which PSU was appointed, in 2008, to the Advisory Working Group for the US/Vietnam Education Task Force. The international dimensions for community engagement are further highlighted by the recent announcement of a new partnership with the International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership (IPSL). IPSL will co-locate at PSU in 2008, in recognition of the complimentary goals of both organizations.