



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

America's Community Colleges Must be Globally Engaged

Michael R. Chipps, Ph.D., President
Northeast Community College

America's community colleges have been slow to come to the global education table. With a mandate to focus primarily on the needs of local communities, global education, at first blush, must seem quite far removed from the concerns and priorities of community colleges. Four year colleges and universities, private liberal arts colleges and research universities have historically seemed to be the types of institutions of higher education to articulate an agenda for global education, even if narrowly defined. And yet, even with these types of institutions, the American Council on Education was still able to say in a report issued in 2008, that "internationalization does not permeate the fabric of most institutions" (Green, Luu and Burris, 2008).

Notwithstanding the distance that community colleges must travel to become on par with four-year institutions in terms of global engagement, of late there has been growing interest by the international community, and especially developing nations, in America's community colleges and, even more specifically, rural community colleges. This is a welcome development, and I have been reflecting on what might explain this phenomenon.

It might originate in the redefinition of the term 'local', which in the literature is being referred to as 'glocal'. For generations, local meant to live, work, play, and be educated within a relatively closed society. In rural America, villages were originally established within a day's horse ride away from each other. And, as technology and transportation networks develop, we realize that many of those once thriving rural villages/communities are struggling for long-term survival. If those areas are to thrive again, 'local' needs to be redefined through technology and transportation. A day's horse ride is now a nanosecond away in terms of transmission time, and the horse has become a pet.

Just as crucial, it is important to consider why America's community colleges and rural community colleges, in particular, need to be globally connected? While I would like to respond to that question with a sophisticated, well-researched and statistically supported response, I began by reflecting on our own successes with global engagement at my institution that includes short term faculty-led study abroad experiences for our students, a longer-term study abroad experience, and a faculty exchange program.

The question still remains as to 'why' community colleges need to be engaged outside of their local districts. First, rural America is finding that it is not all about local. The world is changing rapidly, and access to the globe electronically or physically is changing rapidly as well. Today, we are only nanoseconds technologically or less than a day's flight from our fellow global citizens. In this setting, we are finding that global citizens and nations have more similarities than differences. An obvious example is that jeans and other more Westernized wear have their own common global language. The wants and needs of most world citizens like food, clothing, love, friends, work, and a reasonable life style have stood the test of time. Even though language and culture have differences, the needs, wants and values are quite similar. So, we need to take the mystery out of global and make it more local. And humans need to come face-to-face with it in order to manage the mystery.

America's community colleges need to become more involved because community colleges around the globe are becoming more involved. Today, few of America's community colleges are engaged globally and of those that do, it is done on a limited basis. Recently, I was elected to the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics, which heralds 38 member nations. Most of America's community colleges are not at this global table. One of the common themes heard repeatedly at the latest World Congress referenced a skilled workforce shortage, not just in America, but globally.

America's community colleges are a primary economic engine for the country. They produce much of the workforce, which in turn drives the economy. Developing nations have seen how this has worked for America and are now looking at their community colleges or the community college model to help solve their skill shortages. They realize that community colleges improve the American education and training landscape. They know that the community college can do so with quality, cost efficiency, and a delivery model that is scalable and rapidly deployable. In general terms, the American community college is able to engage with global business and industry using this business model. Global leaders see the dramatic effect on the economy of a nation with a well-trained workforce, which can be accomplished in a relatively short timeline. In summary, countries can experience long-lasting positive effects with minimal investment and maximum return. Community colleges are an ideal investment as they serve the greatest need of creating a skilled workforce, which has a corresponding positive effect on the country's financial well-being.

That is the '*export version*' of the formula, but what about the need for America's community colleges to be introspective about their own global space? Should all Americans become more diverse in thinking and practice? Do we deeply believe that the world is and will become flatter as technology and travel become more and more an integral part of our daily diet?

As higher education leaders, we are responsible for opening new avenues for learning so that our faculty, staff, and students engage in and with the global village. A good method for establishing those linkages is to involve the college community in global matters. We must create places and spaces that encourage enlightenment, excitement, and exploration. We need to encourage the college community to engage in global conversations, exchanges,

and entrepreneurial experiences that can promote opportunities for professional and personal growth. For the community college president, it takes attentive vision to understand the broader context of what students need to learn, to make a clear statement to the college community and the public that it is one of the institution's priorities, and the courage to lead as the college community and the service-area constituents come to terms with precious human and financial resources are being used to advance to the notion of 'glocal'.

We have become familiar with the phrase 'it takes a village.' That village has reached global proportions. Our village borders are no longer found within our community college districts.

Green, M. F., Luu, D., and Burris, B. (2008). Mapping *internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2008 edition*. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.