



AIEA PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

JUNE 2015

The Liberal Arts and Internationalization: Leveraging Student Mobility, Partnerships, and Faculty Hires

Mette Hjort • Lingnan University

*Associate Vice President (Academic Quality Assurance &
Internationalization) and Chair Professor of Visual Studies*





PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

Name: Mette Hjort

Title: Associate Vice President (Academic Quality Assurance & Internationalization); Chair Professor of Visual Studies

Time served as Provost: Two years (as of June 2015)

With historical roots extending back to the 1880s in Guangzhou on the Chinese Mainland, Lingnan University is one of eight government-funded universities in Hong Kong and the only liberal arts institution in the sector. Located in Tuen Mun, in the western New Territories, Lingnan University draws on both Chinese and Western traditions in its provision of liberal arts education. Lingnan is a fully residential, English medium-of-instruction university with a strong commitment to Service Learning and Internationalization. The University enrolls about 2,500 undergraduates and about 500 research and taught postgraduate students and is deeply committed to the provision of quality education to students from lower income backgrounds.

Mette Hjort joined Lingnan in 2005 when the University, building on its acknowledged strengths in analytic aesthetics, secured government support for the creation of a new interdisciplinary Visual Studies program oriented toward capacity building in the visual arts. The larger context for the University's initiative was the government's ambitious plans for a West Kowloon cultural district, a project designed to make art and culture central to Hong Kong's further development in the Post-Handover era. A Dane who grew up in Kenya and was educated in the UK, Holland, Switzerland, Canada, and France, Mette's training encompasses comparative literature, philosophy, media studies, and art history. Much of her research has focused on the cinemas of small nations.



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

Lingnan University is funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC), a body of local and non-local members who are appointed by Hong Kong's Chief Executive. The UGC advises the UGC Chair (currently Mr Edward Cheng Wai-sun), the UGC's Secretary General (Dr. Richard Armour), and the UGC Secretariat on policy and funding issues pertaining to the eight government-funded universities. Internationalization has been a key strategic emphasis for the UGC for many years, and the UGC has supported its institutions' internationalization efforts in a variety of ways. Funding has, for example, been disbursed to the UGC institutions for the purposes of enabling students from lower income backgrounds to join the exchange programs on offer at their universities. The UGC has also provided funding for "student-initiated projects" designed to support the integration of local and non-local student bodies on the UGC-funded campuses in Hong Kong. In recent years the UGC has designed and funded a Hong Kong Pavilion, the aim being to have the eight UGC universities participate in the EAIE, APAIE, and NAFSA conventions as a genuinely collaborating and internally differentiated sector. In the current cycle of Quality Assurance audits—Lingnan University's audit is scheduled for January 2016—institutions have been asked to focus on institutional strategies as they relate to two key themes, one of which is "Global Engagement." All of this to say that internationalization is something that has been mandated and incentivized by the government, and, I might add, heartily embraced and supported by the institutions themselves, including Lingnan University. Internationalization strategies are, quite simply, intentionally pervasive throughout the UGC-funded sector.

Has the role or importance of internationalization at your institution changed over the past five years? If so, how? How do you see it changing in the next five?

The most important change in the last five years is the marked growth in the number of students sent to partner institutions overseas and on the Chinese mainland. Calculating the percentages on a cohort basis, we see that in 2010/11, 32% of our students were given the opportunity to study at a partner institution for a full semester, and if we include shorter summer programs, the figure is 36%. In 2011/12, the figures are 45%/53%; in 2012/13, 48%/63%; in 2013/14, 48%/68%; and in 2014/15, we reached our highest percentages ever, with 65% of our students benefiting from a full semester of study outside Hong Kong. When summer exchanges are included in the calculation, the percentage goes up to 92%. The next five years are likely to involve the following: efforts to ensure that a far greater number of our students have some kind of "Mainland experience;" a piloting of shorter, highly personalized exchanges for research



postgraduates; and an increase in the number of “Global Scholars.” Global Scholars are Lingnan students who pursue two semesters of theme-based studies at two Global Liberal Arts Alliance universities in two different world regions as part of their Lingnan degree programmes. More information appears below.

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?

My predecessor (Professor William Lee, now at Hong Kong University’s continuing education arm, HKU SPACE) tells me that when Lingnan University first started developing partnerships with overseas universities, the challenges associated with being a small liberal arts university in Hong Kong were quite considerable. Although rankings measure research strengths, not teaching strengths, league tables do impinge negatively on the work that we do in the area of student mobility, which has been the cornerstone of our internationalization strategy. With eight UGC-funded universities to choose from in Hong Kong, the tendency for overseas institutions to prefer an MOU with a highly ranked, research-intensive university such as HKU, HKUST, or the Chinese University of Hong Kong is perfectly understandable. A teaching-oriented university such as Lingnan is a less attractive potential partner in this context. Our researchers and generous donors are our main assets in overcoming such barriers. Our researchers have in many cases drawn on their personal networks to create the conditions needed to get new partnerships off the ground. Further, our donors have been staunch supporters of the idea that in the context of a student body drawn from lower-income backgrounds, student mobility is one of the most powerful facilitators of social mobility.

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?

The most problematic aspect of our internationalization efforts to date is student engagement with Mainland China. In this regard, Lingnan University is not alone, for the problems we face are ones that our sister institutions in Hong Kong are also seeking to resolve. In a Post-Handover era, and with the provisions of a one country, two systems framework “expiring” in 2046, there is every good reason to ensure that students graduating from Lingnan University speak Putonghua (Mandarin) fluently (in addition to Cantonese and English) and that they have been immersed in a rich learning environment on the Chinese Mainland for a period of time significant enough to produce most of the transformative effects associated with semester-long exchanges. The



challenge that we currently face has to do with students' desires. 19 of our more than 160 partners are located on the Chinese Mainland, yet the number of students selecting these partner institutions for the purposes of semester-long exchanges remains very modest indeed. We have reached the conclusion that if students are given only one exchange opportunity, they will for the most part select an overseas exchange partner, rather than a partner on the Chinese Mainland. As an alternative to semester-long study abroad, we see great promise in a model that involves our faculty members guiding selected students' research efforts in the context of study trips made possible through collaborative arrangements with Mainland partners. In this respect the PRC government's provisions for "deep collaboration" between the PRC and Hong Kong are promising.

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

We joined the Global Liberal Arts Alliance (GLAA) in 2012 and this has been immensely productive. Established by the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) in 2009 and overseen by Dr. Richard Detweiler (from the GLCA office in Ann Arbor, Michigan), the Alliance brings together about 30 liberal arts universities in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Broadly speaking, the point is to strengthen the liberal arts project on a world-wide basis, through collaboration at all levels, from Chief Academic Officers and Provosts to junior faculty. Hong Kong is a business-oriented city where the concept of liberal arts tends to be poorly understood. With its emphasis on "critical thinking," the liberal arts approach to teaching and learning prompts considerable scepticism in Hong Kong, now more than ever, in the wake of the "Occupy Central" civil disobedience movement. Participation in the GLAA has provided a context of solidarity and mutual support for our efforts and has yielded concrete initiatives that are now benefiting our students. Lingnan is currently participating in the pilot project of a GLAA-designed and administered Global Scholar programme that, as previously mentioned, enables students to study in three world regions (their "home" region and two other regions) in the course of their undergraduate degree. We are currently preparing to send one Visual Studies student to Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco, to pursue learning focused on the global theme of "creativity." A second student from the Faculty of Business is on her way to the American University in Paris, "women and leadership" being the global theme that will provide a red thread through her studies, both at Lingnan and at her selected GLAA institutions. As a result of our participation in GLAA, I have come to see alliance work as absolutely essential to our efforts to develop a robust liberal arts university for Hong Kong.



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

I oversee the work of the Office of Mainland and International Programmes (OMIP), which is run by Ms Joanne Lai and a team of no fewer than ten full-time members of staff. We are very fortunate to have so many “hands on deck” and such able ones! I Chair the Management Board on Internationalisation and this is a group that brings together colleagues from the Office of Service Learning, the Registry, and OMIP. Our Associate Vice President (Student Affairs) is a member of this group as are our Associate Deans and teaching staff representing the three Faculties. We have recently decided to expand the membership of this group, so as to include student members. We now include a “local student representative,” an “overseas student representative,” and a “Chinese Mainland student representative” in our thinking about internationalization through the Board. Input from faculty members is very important, as is feedback from students. We recently developed a partnership in Kazakhstan, with KIMEP University. We have long wanted to facilitate our students’ access to Central Asian countries and this link to KIMEP is very welcome indeed. It is one that builds on the research expertise and networks of one of our accomplished historians, Professor Niccolo Pianciola. Our Council members also take a keen interest in internationalization and in this case it is a matter of pursuing opportunities that they bring us, if, that is, there is a good match with our carefully articulated criteria for new partnerships.

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

Lingnan University’s student body consists mostly of students from the less affluent sectors of Hong Kong society. Although Hong Kong is a global business center and is often described as “Asia’s World City,” as a place where “East meets West,” the clichés capture mostly the horizons available to the affluent. When students join Lingnan, they typically do so with very local—some would say parochial—horizons. At the time of entry, the vast majority of students have had no opportunity for international travel. Also, for most, English as a medium of instruction is a source of some genuine trepidation, and thus an obstacle to a full engagement with the teaching and learning provisions on offer. Internationalization by means of student mobility is a matter of significantly boosting our students’ confidence in English, of providing institutional support for expanded aspirations, and of giving bright young Hong Kongers (only 20% of secondary school graduates in Hong Kong secure a place at a government-funded university) points of access to a much larger world.



Yet, student mobility is but one of the pillars in our Internationalization strategy. 61% of our faculty hold degrees from non-local institutions, and 53% of our faculty are originally non-local. When designing our curricula we give careful attention to global and international issues, and to approaches that foster intercultural conversations. Each year we also enrich our Summer School program by inviting three professors from our Benchmark Institutions to teach an issues-oriented course featuring a compelling mix of local and non-local elements. Of the various “strategies” that we have devised at Lingnan, the one focusing on internationalization has proven to be an exceptionally powerful one. It allows us to effect the sorts of transformations that, for us, are at the very core of the liberal arts project.



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.

ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS
PO Box 90404, Duke University
Durham, NC 27708, 919.668.1928
aiea@duke.edu • www.aieaworld.org

