Internationalizing a campus is likely to show up high on a university leader’s list of priorities. Often, however, the question arises, “Why should internationalizing the campus take precedence over other critical needs?”

The global financial crisis is the latest event that demonstrates the reality and complexity of an increasingly interdependent and globalized world. The responsibility for developing citizens, workers and leaders who will rise to meet the challenges of a changing world rests squarely on the shoulders of those of us in academe.

For over two decades, our university, Kennesaw State, has included international and global dimensions in its curriculum, emphasized study abroad, offered internationally oriented co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and recruited students from abroad. These efforts were generally successful, but they did not accomplish what a deliberate, strategic approach to bringing those pieces together for maximum impact has achieved.

Kennesaw State’s path to organized campus-wide internationalization began in 2005 when the university started preparing for its once-every-10-year re-accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Under new SACS requirements, each institution seeking reaffirmation is required to, among other things, develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to improve one aspect of educational activities. For its QEP, Kennesaw State chose “Global Learning for Engaged Citizenship” and embarked on a strategic intentional path toward internationalization and globalization.

Called “Get Global,” KSU’s QEP defines global learning as an educational process that enhances competencies for participating responsibly in a diverse, international, intercultural and interdependent world. It is built on six principles:

• Internationally oriented learning outcomes (knowledgeable global perspectives, effective intercultural engagement skills, and global citizenship attitudes) must be clear and included within the core curriculum and majors.

• Global learning opportunities are infused in the academic curriculum and in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example, club sport activities such as soccer create opportunities for interactions between American and international students on and off campus, as does the annual “Year Of” programs that focus on one country each year.

• Kennesaw State emphasizes that global learning occurs at home and abroad. Indeed, internationalization and multiculturalism are two sides of the same coin, with students, faculty and staff being able to learn about unfamiliar cultures, societies and outlooks from local immigrant and naturalized communities.

• Resources, incentives and rewards for internationalization must be provided for students, faculty and staff.

• Strong international partnerships must be developed so that students and faculty can enjoy meaningful study abroad experiences.

• Administrative support for internationalization must be assertive. All areas of administration, especially academic affairs, student affairs and the president’s office, must be vocally committed to “getting global.”

Today, Kennesaw State continues to attract accolades for its accomplishments in internationalization, starting in 2010 with its receipt of the U.S. Center for Citizen Diplomacy’s Top Citizen Diplomacy Program Award. That was followed by the 2011 Andrew Heiskell Award for innovation in international education from the Institute of International Education. We then were honored to receive the 2011 Sen. Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization. In 2012, KSU’s Confucius Institute was recognized as one of the top Confucius Institutes in the world.

In its 2012 Open Doors report, the Institute of International Education, together with the Department of State’s
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signposts and strategic perspectives

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, ranked Kennesaw State among the top 10 master’s degree-granting institutions in the nation for student participation in study-abroad programs.

At the same time, the university announced one of its most exciting international developments: a partnership to engage KSU in the restoration of the historic, 18th century Fortezza Poliziano in Montepulciano, Italy. The fortress will be the permanent home for the university’s study-abroad program there, as well as the site for expanded programs in Italian arts, language, culture and cuisine to be offered on credit and non-credit bases to students, alumni and the greater community.

As nice as these citations and developments are, KSU is most proud of the degree to which its efforts have resulted in a vibrant, globalized and internationalized campus that offers students, faculty and staff the opportunity to know the world through the prism of diversity and multicultural understanding.

Last year, over 300 courses offered in seven academic colleges met a requirement of including at least 30 percent global content. Some 800 students traveled abroad and were supported by nearly $700,000 in scholarships funded by a $14 global fee assessed each student. KSU has awarded the Global Engagement Certification to over 130 students who have demonstrated a broad range of intercultural competencies. In addition, our campus annually hosts hundreds of international campus events, including those presented as part of our “Year Of” program, an intensive study of a particular country or region now in its 29th year.

How does one know when a university has achieved its goal of becoming internationalized and globalized? That too is an important part of the strategic approach Kennesaw State employs. Early on, we established 10 goals organized around three supporting pillars put in place to help determine success.

Under the first pillar—tracking progress—our goals include achieving broad-based, cabinet level support; identifying learning opportunities and specialists; securing financial support; and identifying and tracking global learning competencies. The second pillar addresses expanding opportunities by strengthening global learning opportunities, outcomes and achievements in majors and student success programs; doubling financial support for global learning; and expanding the global learning infrastructure in personnel, technology and library resources. The final pillar—increasing participation—includes expanding the promotion of global learning; providing incentives, awards and professional development programs; and increasing campus-wide engagement in global learning.

By many of these measures, Kennesaw State is well on its way to achieving integrated, campus-wide internationalization. We still have hurdles to clear, but we are proud of the thumbs up the university received in the final QEP external evaluation:

“KSU is a much changed institution and one in which global learning for engaged citizenship has been raised to the highest priority, threaded through all KSU units and initiatives, funded in sustainable ways, and become (sic) the catalyst for truly noteworthy achievements . . . KSU has accomplished what some thought impossible: breakthrough growth in global learning and engagement across all dimensions of the university.”

If one were to ask how the effort to bring this about stacks up against other institutional initiatives, I would say it is at the top regarding level of commitment, amount of resources, and sustained intensity of all involved. I also would say it is worth everything invested, especially considering the frequency with which we see reports about students and alumni engaged internationally in diplomatic, business, human services, creative or academic affairs. We have not yet done everything we can do to internationalize KSU, but we are well on our way.

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