Chapter 9

Distance Learning in the Pacific:
A Case Study of American Samoa

Deborah Zuercher
University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA

Jon Yoshioka
University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA

ABSTRACT

The University of Hawaii at Manoa and the American Samoa Department of Education transnational partnership has evolved considerably over its 31 years due to an increased understanding of the unique cultural and contextual components of the teaching and learning process in American Samoa. While the results of this case study cannot be generalized, the findings may provide an opportunity for executive decision-making about launching and developing global transnational distance learning university programs. This chapter provides insight into the context, methods, issues, threats, and solutions and recommendations involved in extending university undergraduate and graduate teacher education across national borders.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the evolution of the transnational partnership that has existed between the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UHM) and the American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE) for thirty-one years. The lessons learned through this transnational partnership are bound by a unique teaching and learning context and cannot be generalized. However, executive decision-making about launching and developing global university programs can be informed through critical reflection on the UHM and ASDOE case study. This chapter will describe the context, methods, issues, and threats involved in extending university undergraduate and graduate teacher education across national borders.

Context

Zeichner and Conklin (2008) suggest that in this era of standardization of teacher education programming, we pause to consider the *contexts* in which teachers and their students operate. To nurture and facilitate the professional development of caring, knowledgeable, and effective teachers, one must carefully study the context in which the teachers will teach. Transnational education programs must consider if adaptations to course content and delivery need to be made if the context of the distant campus differs from the host campus.

Although there are geographical similarities between Hawaii and American Samoa, the cultures of the two islands differ in significant ways. In order to build an effective transnational partnership, it was imperative to consider the prevalent political, cultural and financial issues of each place. For example, introducing a 100% online degree program sounds like a good idea, until one considers the fact that not all of the teachers have access to reliable internet connections every day, or that teachers in American Samoa tend to place great importance on face-to-face, oral communication with their instructors (Ho & Burniske, 2005).

The context of the transnational partnership between the ASDOE and the UHM will be described in detail along with the critical political, cultural, and financial issues that needed to be considered in the creation of an effective transnational educational partnership that meets local professional development needs. The transnational partnership between the UHM and the ASDOE was created to provide undergraduate and graduate education degrees to teachers in American Samoa. The UHM College of Education offers 5 undergraduate degrees, 18 graduate degrees, and 3 certificates through its 8 academic departments and 2 research units at Hawaii campuses. The transnational program offers a Bachelor of Education (BEd) in Elementary Education with dual certification in Early Childhood and Special Education and a Master of Education (MEd) degree

through the Department of Curriculum Studies. The American Samoa undergraduate BEd degree is part of the Institute for Teacher Education and managed through the Territorial Teaching Training Assistance Program (TTTAP) grant.

Pre-service teacher preparation in American Samoa is handled by the American Samoa Community College (ASCC), which offers a two-year associate (AA) program in elementary and special education, along with in-service teacher education and professional development programs (Heine & Emeslochl, 2007). ASCC's programs, however, did not offer teachers the opportunity to become certified, nor did they offer any advanced degrees. Both the UHM and ASDOE recognized the importance of having well trained teachers in the classroom and collaborated on developing a mutually beneficial transnational partnership. Yet, the question of how best to prepare high quality teachers was debatable—one that was as old as the teaching profession itself. The answer was further confounded by contextual issues, such as international politics and cultural diversity, which further complicated the definition of high quality teaching in transnational teacher education programs.

The first factor to consider in developing the transnational partnership is whether the goals of the partners are closely aligned. When both partners have a similar goal structure, it is easier to develop a mutually beneficial program. The UHM College of Education vision of teacher education is a community of educators who provide innovative research, teaching, and leadership in an effort to further the field of education and prepare professionals to contribute to a just, diverse, and democratic society. The mission of the ASDOE is to ensure student success by providing *high quality teaching* and learning opportunities to all our children. The merger of these two missions has resulted in a transnational partnership where instructors from UHM come to American Samoa to teach face-to-face, hybrid, and online classes to American Samoa teachers who are seeking BEds, MEds, and teacher certification.

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