

Chapter 30

The Global Scholar: Challenges and Opportunities of Working with Transnational Faculty in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the challenges associated with college faculty members crossing international borders to be employed by higher education institutions. This process includes challenges associated with the technical aspects of recruiting and hiring faculty members of different nationalities and then the subsequent challenges of understanding cultural dynamics in the classroom and how faculty members can be prepared to deal with these cultural differences. The chapter includes a practical analysis of these issues and concludes with recommendations for the stronger institutional integration of transnational faculty to higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching has been described as both an art and a science, and the success of faculty members in their instructional roles is often linked to their ability to understand and respond to their students (Kuhnen, van Egmond, Haber, Kuschel, Ozelsel, Rossi, &

Spivak, 2012). This interaction is a process of finding ways to communicate with students and motivate them to have an interest and a desire to learn about a given topic. An important element in this teaching process is mutual understanding, both of what the teacher is trying to accomplish, and what and why students are enrolled in a given class. In a growing number of situations in the US and around the world, college students are enroll-

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ing in higher education in non-native countries, meaning historically that there are more students studying in different countries than ever before. The higher education environment has truly become transnational.

To teach students from different countries, there are an increasing number of international faculty teaching in higher education institutions in the US and around the world (Altbach, 2006; Hser, 2005; Sheppard, 2004), and they are responsible for teaching a broader array of students both from the US and around the world. And although the number of international students participating in US higher education has stabilized, there is a greater diversity of nationalities represented in the classroom. This internationalization of American higher education challenges how institutions respond with supports for faculty and can lead to faculty morale issues (either in support of or intention for faculty and students to leave; Marvasti, 2005; Olsen, 1993; Rosser, 2004) and the quality of instruction in the classroom (Padsakoff & Williams, 1986).

This chapter will provide an important discussion of the institutional factors that need to be addressed for making the US higher education institution more adaptable to international faculty, and the findings of the chapter will also help to inform how international universities work with their international faculty from countries such as the US. The chapter is grounded in the belief that higher education's quality is primarily based on the quality of instruction that faculty members can provide (Bai, 1999). As Bai further argued, the quality of faculty is directly linked to their ability, and their willingness, to teach. Bai conceded that many faculty are hired exclusively or primarily to engage in research activities, but that for a real benefit to the institution, faculty members must know how to communicate effectively with students, even when conducting research. The particular challenge for higher education institutions, then, is to find ways to prepare faculty to teach cross-culturally (Gopal, 2011).

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Cultural Challenges

Nearly three decades ago, US Senator Paul Simon authored *The Tongue Tied American* (1980) in which he decried the cultural and linguistic barriers many Americans face. He noted, for example, the Pepsi-Cola advertising campaign "Pepsi Brings Good Things to Life" as being culturally and linguistically translated to "Pepsi brings your ancestors back to life." Such a lack of global understanding reflects both a shortsighted and narrow view of the world that must change he argued. Such misunderstandings were somewhat problematic in the 1980s, but in the 21st century, they are inexcusable. There are at least three domains of cultural challenges that specifically impact the growing internationalization of higher education: student expectations, faculty work beliefs, and faculty community integration.

Student Expectations

One of the hallmarks of American higher education is that students have tremendous choice in their courses of study and the time, location, and schedule of classes that they pursue. This is further translated into pedagogy that allows for student questioning of class content and active debate with faculty members. Such in-class activity is often counter to that provided in Asian cultures when the faculty member is seen as an 'elder' or someone not to be questioned. Similarly, the cultures of Middle Eastern higher education institutions are dominated by beliefs that instruction should be efficient and make use of lectures, often making use of large lecture classrooms, and the thought of students challenging a professor are unheard of (not to mention different gender specific expectations in many countries). Additionally, student expectations for choice of curriculum and coursework can be highly challenging for faculty to understand and appreciate, either due

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