Establishing Sustainable Relations in International Higher Education: An Integrative Consultant Model Position

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ABSTRACT

International collaboration between institutions in the United States and abroad are as complex as they are ubiquitous. Success or failure of these endeavors may be the result of increasing economic pressures on the home institution's campus or institutional capacity of faculty to deliver programs abroad. No matter the cause, the result of a failed or unsustainable program is a negative experience for both the U.S. and international institution. Building on experiences developed over 8 years working with Middle Eastern universities, Ohio University's Global Services Program (OUGSP) and their cadre of experienced consultants have established a unique and sustainable model to broaden the institutional reach without bankrupting the institution or exhausting the capacity of its' faculty. At the center of the endeavor is determining institutional need and creating a workable long term plan to meet that need by developing a mutually beneficial budget, conducting a formative assessment and determining program requirements, developing strategies, providing professional development for onsite faculty and conducting regular program evaluation.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

History of the OHIO Global Services Program

The OHIO Global Services Program was established in 2010 after a four-year partnership with universities in Jordan that began in 2006. The OHIO Global Services Program (GSP) is presently in its 8th year of global partnership development. Dr. Teresa Franklin, Ohio University College of Education faculty member, and an Ohio University alumnus living and working in the Middle East, established the original partnership with a university located in the region as part of a program development effort to infuse technology into teaching and learning. This program development eventually spread to four other universities in Jordan.

The program sought to develop a High Diploma Program for teachers to learn how to integrate technology for teaching and learning. At the request of the University's Colleges of Education and Information Technology, a program was developed focused on female teachers in the primary and secondary systems in Jordan who were the least trained in the use of technology. The University felt that help was needed in the development of the curriculum and contacted the Ohio University alumnus who approached his alma mater to provide support in this endeavor. The result was the development of a High Diploma in Information and Communications Technology for Education (ICTE). In the fall of 2006, the ICTE program was approved and the program admitted students.

After the curriculum and program of study were developed and content identified by Ohio University, the ICTE program was reviewed by the deans of the College of Education and College of Information Technology and approved. The curriculum was then sent to the country's Ministry of Higher Education for approval. Once approvals were obtained, Dr. Franklin and a team of faculty arrived at the University and conducted professional development with the institution's faculty who would teach in the ICTE program. Seminars were designed to help the faculty develop syllabi and course materials for their classes, and gain a pedagogical understanding of working with teachers and technology. Each semester for two years, Ohio faculty went to Jordan to conduct professional development and each year Ohio University sent a team of program evaluators to track the progress of the faculty, students and program. From this one effort the OHIO Global Services Program (GSP) at Ohio University was born.

The OHIO Global Services Program Today

Today the OHIO Global Services Program is located in the Vice President's Office of Global Affairs. The GSP is operated as consultant services for international institutions of higher education, business and industry, and technology transfer. The focus of the program is three-fold: (1) develop a consultancy business to support the development of international higher education programs, (2) enhance the global presence for Ohio University, and (3) provide supplemental post-graduate educational experiences for recent graduates, emeriti faculty, and administrators. The GSP has as its mission and vision:

Mission: The OHIO Global Services Program is a consultancy service within Ohio University with the purpose of providing expert assistance to international institutions of higher education, business and industry, and to facilitate technology transfer to international partners.

Vision: Building on relationships with highly successful Ohio University international alumni, faculty and students, the OHIO Global Services Program will create an internationally recognized brand of quality advisors supporting a wide variety of dynamic international institutions of higher education that produce quality graduates that will change the world.

The OHIO Global Services Program is one of three major components of the office of Global Affairs: (1) The Global Leadership Center (GLC); (2) Global Internship and Mentorship (GIM); and (3) The Global Services Program (GSP). Each of these components provides a different type of outreach to the international community.

The **Global Leadership Center** (GLC) provides a certificate to undergraduates at Ohio University that seek to add an international component to their undergraduate degree program. This 19-hour *GLC Certificate* includes both coursework and an international collaborative consulting project conducted in May of each year. The program also offers the opportunity for students to participate in an international internship, employment, or study abroad. A *GLC Cultural Awareness Certificate* is being designed to provide opportunities for both Ohio University students and international students to work together online to learn about each other's culture. This certificate would be lead by native English language speakers to help international students improve their English speaking abilities as they work with Ohio University students to learn about each other's culture.

The **Global Internships & Mentorship** (GIM) program, is in the developmental stage, and will be designed to provide post-graduate employment in an international arena. The GIM seeks to place recent graduates in paid internships for up to 2 years with corporations, universities and within industry. Ohio University alumni and emeriti faculty will mentor interns to enable knowledge and technology translation to facilitate global development within the intern's country or employment.

The **Global Services Program** (GSP) is responsible for a much broader range of services within the international arena with targeted work in higher education, business and industry, language learning, and talent placement. Within institutions of higher education, the GSP consults on program design and capacity building, program evaluation, university and program accreditation and specialized professional association review (SPA) and quality assurance review through implementation of performance assessment and key performance indicators (KPIs). Within business and industry, the GSP can provide consultation in strategic planning, as well as the services associated with the aforementioned quality assurance review. Finally, the GSP designs and develops cultural awareness programs to be delivered on the Ohio University campus to visiting clients. Each cultural awareness program is specifically tailored to the needs of the visiting delegation. In the past, countries and universities have sent their teachers from K-12 and higher education to a 10-day workshop that included English speaking activities, courses in the use of technology for teaching and learning in ESL environments, linguistics teacher preparation and American cultural activities. This has at times lead to placement of talent in those countries to continue the opportunities to learn English.

The C-PIER Quality Cycle

The OHIO GSP developed and utilizes a quality assurance process called C-PIER. The C-PIER process was created using W.E. Deming's (2000) PDCA cycle of plan, do, check, and act and is designed to reinforce the organization's focus on quality. The C-PIER process, seen in *Figure 1: C-PIER Quality Assurance Cycle,* contains the following: (1) Client, (2) Planning, (3) Implementation, (4) Evaluation, and (5) Refine. This quality assurance cycle represents the basis for consulting with clients who approach Ohio University seeking higher education services at all levels.

Figure 1: C-PIER Quality Assurance Cycle.
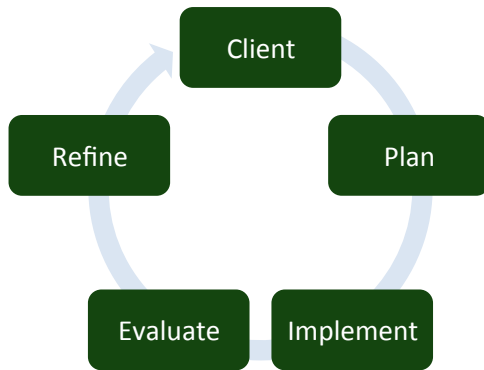
PROCESS

An examination of the component parts of each module demonstrates the quality improvement nature of the C-PIER model. See *Figure 2: C-PIER Process* for a visual representation of the process in flowchart form.

Client

The C-PIER process is based on recurring quality engagement with clients. There are two methods of client identification and recruitment. The first method is through an introduction by a third-party, often a graduate of Ohio University that has an interest in developing a relationship between the two entities. Third-party introductions may be conducted on a fee-for-service basis or at no cost. Fee-for-service introductions must be accounted for in budget planning. Often, the third-party is located within the global region of the client and contributes to project success by serving as "feet-on-the-ground." Third-party service providers often provide cultural orientations and translation services. The second method of client introduction is more direct, and constitutes the potential client contacting the University directly. This method often results from institutional reputation or past work in which the client has reason to believe the institution may be helpful in solving a particular issue or project. On rare occasions, Ohio University personnel may here of a potential client is in need of some assistance and initiates first contact.

Once the client is identified, contact is made by the OHIO GSP Director to determine the project's scope. Depending upon the complexity of the project, this contact may be facilitated via phone call, e-mail, or in more complex situations, onsite face-to-face. At the completion of the initial meeting, the GSP Director will conduct a Project Viability Assessment (PVA) to determine the assets need to produce the best probability for a successful completion of the project. Elements of the PVA include: identification of potential consultants; tasks associated with the project; a budget that includes indirect expenses required by the institution, and direct expenses such as consultant compensation and travel, supplies, translation and finders fees, and cultural experts; revenue necessary to offset these costs; and a timeline for project implementation and completion. During this portion of the process, potential consultants are identified and contacted regarding their possible interest in the project. Consultants are selected based on their knowledge, skills and experience as well as their interest in global consulting. Consultant credentials are verified and vetted by the GSP Director before submitting vitas to the client for final approval. The process is finalized when a timeline is developed and all tasks are placed into project management software that produces a Gantt chart that produces a critical path sequence of project events.

The final stage in the PVA is the determination to proceed or withdraw from the project. Based on consultant and time availability, cost to benefit ratio, and connection to the institutional mission, the OHIO GSP Director will determine if the project should proceed to both the VP for Global Affairs and the client. Once the project is approved, the Director will develop and forward a Service Agreement defining the scope and sequence of the project to the client and VP for Global affairs for signature, prior to initiating the planning stage.

Planning

Much of the preliminary planning was completed in the PVA stage of project development. The planning stage will verify the information collected during the PVA and formalize the processes to be used in the project.   Tasks and the project timeline will be revised in the project management software as necessary. Consultants will be contacted, placed under contract and travel arrangements for site visits will be initiated. Relevant materials provided by the client for use in the project will be forwarded during the planning phase and a list of other documents and websites will be generated.

Implementation

There are two stages of project implementation, data collection and report production. The data collection stage is divided into off-site and on-site work. Off-site data collection, conducted before the site visit, consists of a thorough document analysis and peer review. Materials provided from the institution will be supplemented by other documents found on the web and within libraries. When applicable, a review of the relevant literature will be conducted. A summation of the review will be created and presented during the site visit. The initial site visit is used to verify the conditions identified by the client, conduct focus groups and interviews, present the project scope to stakeholders, and enhance the team's cultural awareness. An exit brief, with preliminary findings and areas to consider, is presented to the client and selected invitees.

Upon return to Ohio University, the collected data is analyzed and summarized, and a report is produced. The final evaluation report is forwarded to the OHIO GSP Director for final review and edit. Once approved, the report is forwarded the to the client for review and comment. Results from the client comments are utilized in future stages or phases in ongoing projects.

Evaluation

Once the first phase action report is delivered to the client, OHIO GSP Director and the project consultants conduct an informal after-action discussion to evaluate the project's processes and progress. The evaluation consists of a review of the project's administration, including travel arrangements and payment status, assessment of time commitments and recalibration of requirements, comprehensiveness of data collection, and accuracy and clarity of report writing. The purpose of the evaluation process is to improve the current project as well as provide guidance for future projects.

Figure 2: C-PIER

C-PIER Process
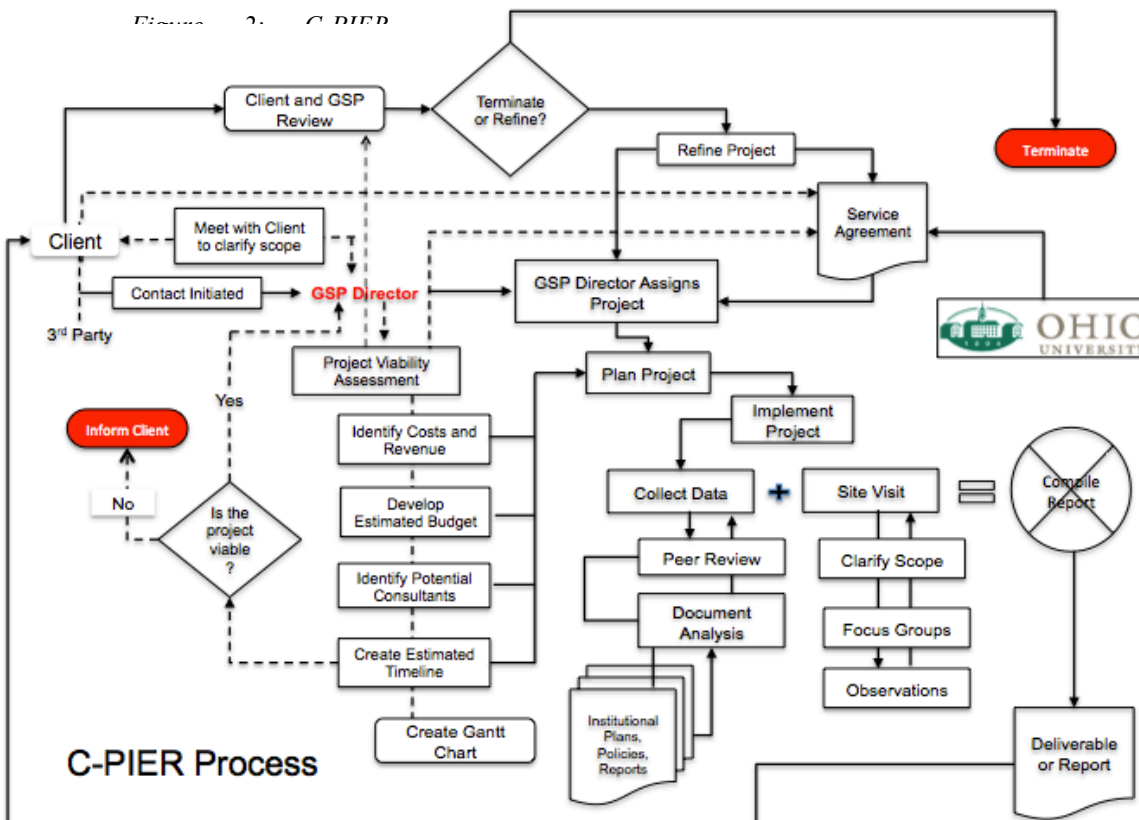
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Refine

Process refinement consists of review, reinforcement, and recalibration. As stated in the **Evaluation** stage, evaluation is critical to the success of OHIO GSP. As a tool of evaluation, targeted review produces positive and productive program change and is essential to the continuous quality improvement process. In addition to the project evaluation, all aspects of the program are reviewed at the end of stage, phase or conclusion of a project. Reinforcement efforts focus on both the client and the process. Continual contact with project partners, including the client, consultant and third party service providers builds a relationship of trust, critical to operational success. Effective processes are reinforced while ineffective or inefficient procedures are refined or eliminated. The result of reinforcement is the development of a more efficient and effective program. Recalibration efforts are focused on program efforts during the planning and implementation phase. While each program has its own unique elements and requirements, task analysis is conducted in a more general way. The primary method to modify and adjust tasks related to budget, resource allocation, revenue, travel and consultant time is to recalibrate the standards and criteria in which the original assumptions were made.

CONCLUSION

The OHIO Global Services Program is uniquely designed to respond to the evolving needs of global higher education. Engaging with institutional alumni to provide in-country support and Emeriti faculty and staff, as well as faculty from other institutions to serve as project consultants, has created a powerful and dynamic organization. Flexibility and agility allows the program to respond to emerging needs of international institutions while meeting its vision of creating an "internationally recognized brand of quality advisors supporting a wide variety of dynamic international institutions of higher education that produce quality graduates that will change the world." The C-PIER process reinforces the program's commitment to excellence and provides an example to clients of the importance of engaging in self-reflection for continuous quality improvement.

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