

“Fulbrighting” through England and Scotland

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Sometimes life provides surprising opportunities to do things for a second time, when one might not have expected to have such a second chance. Many years ago as a teenager I visited Edinburgh, Scotland, and left in the firm belief that I would likely never again get back there. When I was selected for a Fulbright International Education Administrator US-UK award earlier this summer I quickly realized that among the eleven top UK universities our group would visit, the University of Edinburgh was included. Thus, Edinburgh became a travel destination for the second time in my life. Apart from Edinburgh the three weeks of intense discussions, workshops, presentations, and cultural excursions got us to Imperial College, Royal Holloway, East Anglia, Sussex, Durham, York, Aberdeen, among other universities.

INTERNATIONALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION

International education – it should be noted – has grown exponentially over the past decades. In fact, a recent report by the British government states that it is like-

ly “for numbers of international students in higher education to grow by 15-20% over the next five years.”¹ In the United States the numbers of international students grew by 5.7% to 764,495 during the 2011/12 academic year.² However, as percentage of the total US student population, the international student population has not grown over the last 10 or so years. Also, while many rightfully argue that the future of the university comes in the guise of the “globalized university,” it is noteworthy that the US share on the international student market has dropped by around 5% between 2000 and 2005. Even while in absolute terms the numbers of international students are about 32% larger than they were in 2001 (contributing \$21 billion to the US economy), this loss of international market share should give rise to concern since, as NYU’s President John Sexton put it aptly in the October 2012 issue of *Scientific American*, the measure of a nation’s creativity is determined by the extent of its global science outreach and – may I add – its cumulative global scientific rel-

evance. International students are also likely to become a more significant factor for universities and colleges as in many places the supply of domestic students is stagnating or even declining.

The share of British universities in the international student market too has fallen from 16% (1998) to about 12% (in 2006 and 2007), even while the numbers of international students continued to grow during that period. British universities earn a significant part of their income through foreign students and have in the last 10 or so years embarked on a very deliberate effort to increase their share of international students (i.e., students not from the European Union). Thus, for example, the number of international students at the University of Sussex grew from just over 500 in 2007 to over 1,600 in 2012. Similarly, at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen the number of international students amounts to about 10-12% (ca. 1,500). Scottish universities depend on international students for about £300m of their £3bn overall income.

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It may not be a very fruitful enterprise to attempt a direct comparison between two systems that evolved out of their own unique history, respond to the needs of a particular socio-cultural and economic context, and are embedded in their own specific political culture. Still, the (reasonable) expectation for this award was that we could learn from each other's best practices and virtuous cycles.

Thus, the Fulbright award aimed to give our group of US college administrators an opportunity to explore best practices and experiences with international students and study abroad programs in Britain, as well as to share our knowledge with counterparts in the UK. It was, of course, also a chance to establish institutional connections with colleagues and programs in England and Scotland. Finally, there was an opportunity to compare societal, cultural and institutional differences between teaching and research institutions in the US and the UK. The program was tight and intense; there was indeed precious little – perhaps too little – free time built into the program.

Included in our group

were 19 other administrators of study abroad programs, student development, or academic affairs divisions from various larger and smaller public and private colleges and universities. All of them professed a passion for study abroad opportunities and care for students coming from outside of the US. Their enthusiasm and professional and personal experience as educators was palpable, and already at the end of our first day a sense of mutual recognition and camaraderie began to set in. As we traveled along, it became clear to me that with regard to the CUNY system this particular program could be of particular value to administrators in the central administration, since the exposure to practices at some of the very best universities in the United Kingdom is really an eye-opener at many levels.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

Our first leg of the journey carried us to Norwich, northeast of London, to the University of East Anglia (UEA), a fifty-year old institution which has begun a significant journey of internationalization and im-

provement of its national and international reputation in several disciplines and courses of study. Indeed, UEA ranks currently as number one in Britain in terms of student satisfaction. Responding to my question what would be the practices leading to this outcome, the Director of Internationalization, Richard Harvey, revealed that care about and responsiveness to student concerns and issues simply is a deeply engrained culture at all levels of the university where faculty and staff colleagues will hold each other responsible and accountable for any and all student issues. However, student satisfaction in general is increasingly a significant measure that British universities are evaluated by, and so UEA must be doing a particularly good job at it.

Since the British government raised tuition a few years ago to a now rather significant £9,000, universities are experiencing a more customer service-oriented and -intensive student population that requires adjusting to. As part of their very deliberate strategy of internationalization we witness significant amounts of



Royal Holloway University of London



Inside the 14th century Merchant Adventurer's Hall in York



Dr. Henke visiting the University of York campus

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dedicated staff (including the maintenance of overseas offices) at virtually all our host universities, who are organizing study abroad programs and recruiting aggressively in places such as China, India, South Korea, or Japan. In fact, it seems that the largest cohort of foreign students is from China. Given this obvious focus on China and Chinese students, however, the question arises to what extent one can really speak of a true “internationalization.”

Offering and promoting diversity and internationalization is not automatically a productive venture; they require being pro-active and strategic. At one of our stops we learned that, according to a study, only 15% of Chinese students in the UK have British friends. Furthermore, there can be an expectation that once China has satisfied its internal capacities in excellent research graduates, it may turn inward and begin to educate its students back at home, thus drastically reducing this pool of international students to UK universities. There is a challenge as well in interesting British (and Scottish) students in the inherent benefits of a

study abroad experience. As only 1% of UK students are choosing an academic program because of its study abroad opportunities, the challenge becomes to be very intentional at offering these opportunities and at internationalizing the curriculum, as well as student support services.

Because of the challenges stemming from a one-sided internationalization strategy, many universities are stopping active recruitment in China and are diversifying their foreign intake sources – a strategy that is slowly beginning to show results.

The University of Edinburgh, for example, is becoming much more proactive in recruiting in Latin American, India, and other areas. At the University of Sussex, 25% of its students are international students and its academic staff comes from over 50 countries. These figures are typical for a number of the institutions we visited. However, internationalization may also – like at Sussex and University of East Anglia – include degree requirements including compulsory study abroad semesters for all undergraduates in certain degree programs.

Like British employers, the universities are concerned in inculcating transferable skills, self-confidence, and foreign language competencies in their students. For example, according to one study cited to us, 47% of British employers are dissatisfied with university graduates’ international cultural awareness; 55% are dissatisfied with their foreign language skills. International education is thus seen as a critical and strategic way of attaining these skills.

However, as mentioned before, many British students are not easily convinced of the benefits of learning a second language, acquiring valuable soft and transferable skills, and gaining intercultural competence. In part this has to do with relative costs of an overseas education, lack of financial support, but also with a relative lack of interest for working outside of Britain or outside the Commonwealth.

This may seem surprising, since Britain is a diverse country with quite long-standing and intense relations with many countries within and beyond the boundaries of its former Empire, and because it has a globalized economy.

But perhaps one should not be too surprised because it is also a country that maintains notions of “splendid isolation,” as evidenced in the survival of the British Pound (rather than adoption of the Euro) and its current Prime Minister’s recent public question of whether it should remain an EU member.

At the University of Birmingham’s Shakespeare Institute (in Stratford-upon-Avon), its director is also hard-pressed to respond (and really did not provide a very satisfying answer) to my challenging question regarding the Institute’s research into the devastating impact the teaching in many British colonies of Shakespeare (and other British “classics”) as the literary norm had on the development of indigenous language and literary traditions.

In order to help “market” the transferable skills, many universities – through their career centers or student development services – have become very intentional in assisting students with the articulation (e.g., in their CVs) of the skills they obtained during study abroad experiences.

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Employability is greatly emphasized by many of the universities we visited – in particular, at Robert Gordon University (RGU) in Aberdeen and Edinburgh University. We were pleasantly surprised to learn in Aberdeen that RGU actually continues to provide career support to its students even years after their graduation. Also, RGU establishes and maintains especially close relations with industry partners to provide guaranteed internship opportunities to its students.

CUTTING EDGE RESEARCH AND TEACHING
During our visit we encountered many cutting-edge innovations, clever marketing techniques, and an impressive allocation of resources to international student recruitment, study abroad opportunities for British students, globalization of research and curriculum. Many lessons are to be learned here.

Imperial College dazzled our group with its stellar accomplishments as a research institution, while University of Sussex impressed us by its location as the “London by the sea” and its vibrant cultural environment attracting students interested in traveling northwestern Europe

while getting a solid degree from a highly reputable research institution. The development at Imperial College (which actually is a university) of a surgical knife which during the actual surgery analyzes the tissue it is cutting – and so, for example, can distinguish between cancerous and healthy tissue – will forever change how medical students will learn surgical procedures. The University of Sussex in Brighton – as all institutions we visited – has embarked on a deliberate strategy to attract and diversify its body of international students. In this effort it presents itself as a dynamic research institution located in a vibrant and diverse community at the doorstep of mainland Europe. It also prides itself on its interdisciplinary focus in research.

At the University of Birmingham, located in Britain’s second largest city, our group of Fulbright awardees was introduced to the future of the 21st century classroom. Dr. Richard Clay, co-director of do.collaboration demonstrated a new technology – touch-tables – that will impact the way research will be displayed in museums, laboratories, and in the (global) class-

room. In a nutshell, we were shown an approximately eight by six feet wall-mounted “tablet computer,” on which research objects are displayed and can be blown up in size, be edited to have explanations added to them, and be distributed to other satellite screens along the wall of the classroom/lab. These satellite monitors may serve as work stations for student group work, and can be outfitted with technology that makes them interact with smart phones. These interactive technologies lend themselves to all kinds of collaboration in the classroom, through the internet, and can actually engender new research fields and disciplines. In fact, Dr. Clay invokes the notion of “post-disciplinarity.”³

As well, the new way to display graphics as super-magnified high-resolution imagery may lead to new research collaboration (say, for example, between historians and art historians). As he explained, attention to minute details in historical documents displayed on screen, which hitherto escaped the attention of historians, have already led to new findings and research projects.

The University of

Edinburgh’s Global Academies with their multi-disciplinary Masters programs (some of them online) presented another intriguing model for the further globalization of curriculum and research. Through the Global Academies Edinburgh delivers a series of study programs that are multi-disciplinary, have a global focus on the greatest challenges facing us today, work in partnerships across academia, commerce, civil society and local communities, and engage in novel teaching and research practices across the university. Study programs, some of which are also delivered as online modules, can lead to postgraduate certificates (e.g., in global development challenges, in African and International Development), to Masters degrees (e.g., in Global Challenges, in Science Communication and Public Engagement, in Global Health and Infectious Diseases, in Public Health, or in Clinical Education), and even to a Ph.D. (in Global Health). The Global Academies also allow for independent research opportunities. Thus, for example, the Academies currently offer a “Peacebuilding Through

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Dr. Richard Clay (University of Birmingham) demonstrating a historical map magnified on a touchable screen



View on the 11th century cathedral at the University of Durham



Meeting with University of Edinburgh representatives

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Media Arts” research project, a “Crossing global health boundaries” project, and a “Safer water in West Africa” research project – to mention only a few examples. Without doubt, Edinburgh’s Global Academies are a visionary educational undertaking, allowing for significant flexibility to accommodate a variety of internationalization projects under a larger umbrella.⁴

BUT – INTERNATIONALIZATION WITHOUT DEEP DIVERSITY?

However, what struck many of us already towards the middle of our tour – a sentiment that was finally voiced and discussed at our last stop at the University of Edinburgh, when a number of key Scottish policymakers sat at our table – is an egregious lack of diversity among the international office personnel and study abroad officers whom we met, as well as among the university executives we encountered. With representatives from *Universities Scotland*, *Scottish Development International*, and the Scottish Government International Division (Education) in the room, I made it explicit that as a city, as an institution, or as a country bent on

internationalization, that very same internationalization has to be modeled and embodied by all the committees and offices being representative of and for it, and that as a group we did not witness that internationalization and deep diversity during our visit. Given Britain’s long-standing social and ethnic diversity, however, there is a glaring discrepancy between the rhetoric of “internationalization,” “engagement with global communities,” or “intercultural competence” and the homogenous demographic of our British hosts. In fact, it is a quite obvious limitation of the British university system’s strenuous efforts at internationalization.

Our hosts were at pains to explain that concerns with diversity in Britain revolve more around providing access to higher education to socio-economically under-privileged strata, than around concerns of a diversification away from its white, heterosexual, and male-dominated university system. And then, almost as a sidebar, we are told by Mr. Alan Mackay (Deputy Vice Principal International), that in the very room we are meeting just recently he had to face a group of agitated foreign students

accusing the university of racism. Quite obviously some of the blame lies with the (increasingly) restrictive migration policies of the British government, which continuously seems to respond to populist sentiments and send questionable signals – for example, with its Prime Minister’s recent remark that Britain might consider leaving the European Community. The Fulbright group left our colleagues – who profess an awareness of the limitations – with a clear charge that global engagement has to be modeled at all levels through various affirmative action and equal opportunity tools, and cannot just be performed or mimicked. As we visited exclusively some of the top research institutions in Britain, we were also becoming aware of the relative dearth of pathways in the British system for access to higher education for disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

As well, the already mentioned relative concentration of international student recruitment on one or two major contributing countries must be interrogated with regard to its long-term viability and its benefits for other students. As a country

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