

“Symbiosis”/“Mutualism” and the University of the Philippines’ Enhanced and Strategic Internationalization Agenda

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Internationalization is a university’s response to globalization, which is the strong and growing interdependence of countries, economies and cultures (Stromquist 2007). It is the fusion/hybridization of academic culture and pedagogy, including ethos and value systems, of universities across nations. It provides the opportunity for strengthening academic resources, while retaining the university’s distinct identity in the fast changing world. It is therefore essential for the future development of the University of the Philippines (UP) and other Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to pursue internationalization, given the rapid changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural landscapes, and the desire of universities always to be at the forefront of teaching, research and extension work. Internationalization is being vigorously and aggressively undertaken by many universities in developed and developing countries, including those which were not as “open” before. In fact now, the most internationalized nations are the most nationalistic ones.

The ASEAN Economic Cooperation 2015/Integration 2020 aims to form an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which is the transformation of 10 member countries of ASEAN into a single market and production base for the free flow of goods, services, investment, capital and skilled labor. The AEC is further characterized as a highly competitive region of equitable economic development and a region fully integrated into the global economy (<http://www.asean.org/communities/asean-economic-community>). Philippine universities and others in the ASEAN region are being challenged today to produce graduates who can compete in the global market and undertake researches that can contribute to the growth and development of their communities. These academic activities could also enhance the reputation of their respective universities. It is then expected from UP and other Philippine HEIs to have greater mobility of faculty and students, to have international quality programs and more collaborative research and curricular activities, and to meet higher employer standards.

The 2008 Charter of the University of the Philippines (UP), mandates the national university to (1) lead in setting academic standards and initiating innovations in teaching, research, and faculty development; (2) serve as a graduate university by providing advanced studies and specialization for scholars, scientists, writers, artists, and professionals; (3) serve as a research university in various fields of expertise and specialization by conducting basic and applied research; (4) lead as a public service university by providing various forms of community, public and volunteer service; and (5) serve as a regional and global university in cooperation with international and scientific unions, network universities, scholarly and professional associations in the Asia Pacific region and around the world.

Internationalization is not new to most units of UP. Research/creative work collaboration with other universities/HEIs abroad has been done since its founding more than 100 years ago. International mobility has been generally undertaken by faculty members/staff some of whom are PhD graduates of foreign universities.

UP (and other Philippine HEIs) should strive to promote Philippine consciousness/culture and products/services, while appreciating/benefiting from those of

partner universities. The relationship should be more of “symbiosis” with partners almost of equal “footing”/level or “gaining” something vital from each other; or a “mutualism” where each partner has “strength/s” to share with the other. The relationship should be assessed so that one should not become a “predator nor a “prey” to the other. For this reason, UP is developing its capabilities to be able to enter this internationalization/globalization arena well-prepared, ready for productive and beneficial partnership/engagement.

UP has several activities/organizational structures that are being enhanced by the present administration. All eight Constituent Universities (CUs) of UP have been developing an office and/or staff addressing the needs for internationalization. Communications and data banking/analysis among CUs and other partners are facilitated through the e-UP portal for internationalization. The Office of Institutional Linkages (OIL) of the UP System coordinates all the above-mentioned offices in terms of disseminating available scholarships and short-term courses, calls for paper presenters, creation of possible collaborations in research and publications, participation in the ASEAN-University Network – ASEAN Credit Transfer System (AUN-ACTS), etc.

Enrichment of the database of foreign university partners, projects and activities for consistent monitoring is ongoing. Strengthening of former partnerships and creation of new ones with top universities and associations, especially those where outstanding UP graduate students have had ongoing researches and programs, are also being undertaken. Active participation in international events/conferences as research paper readers, membership in Steering/Executive Committees, and hosting of international conferences are being carried out. Facilitation of research/training partnerships with universities has been initiated. Other faculty/student and researcher development include support for (a) the acquisition of Master’s, PhD and postdoctoral fellowships, (b) implementation of UP Visiting Professor Program and (c) research dissemination travel grant and (d) international publication awards. A “Foreign-trained Filipino PhD Recruitment Program” has been started to increase the number of PhD advisor/senior researchers especially in areas needed for development but for which the country lacks the expertise.

Recent efforts that have been spearheaded by UP with the help of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) involved the improvement of understanding by the UP community (and other Philippine HEIs) of the value of internationalization (internalization) through the hosting of the following international conferences and workshop: (a) mini-symposium on marine biodiversity and neurosciences with HKUST (Hongkong University of Science and Technology, which is ranked number one in the QS Asia University Rankings, in June 2013; (b) mini-conference on internationalization with speakers from Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), HKUST and Elsevier/SCOPUS in July 2013; (c) workshop on Building International Collaborations for Philippine HEIs and Graduate Sandwich Programs with experts from ASEA-UNINET (ASEAN-European University Network) Member Universities in November 2013; (d) International Conference on Shakespeare in Asia and (e) International Conference on Women Studies, both in December 2013.

Other endeavors were focused on the internationalization of academic programs such as (a) planning for the shift of the academic calendar to the western calendar to harmonize the sandwich program activities and research collaborations with partner foreign universities; (b) development of advanced General Education (GE) courses to support K-12 education reform and prepare college graduates for international employment and graduate studies; and

(c) promotion of joint degree, sandwich and accelerated graduate programs with leading foreign universities. In addition, results of research and creative works are also “internationalized” via transformation of UP journals to e-journals. Academic research collaborations with leading foreign universities are being reviewed and strategic activities are being planned for the next three years.

Challenges that may hamper internationalization include (1) lengthy processing time of visas (faculty and student); (2) safety and security of inbound students, and in rare cases also outbound students; (3) implementation of the shift of academic calendar that varies from the world’s academic calendar; (4) UP/the national university has limited slots for foreign students; and (5) courses offered in some undergraduate programs do not meet the needs of the international community.

When a student/faculty or institution desires or plans to consider an academic exchange activity with another, there are those so-called “push” and “pull” factors. Both factors make the “exchange” or “visit”/collaboration possible and eventually this becomes successful. The “push” factors are those that make the potential partner/academic institution become stimulated or assured that the engagement will be successful and these would include (1) academic productivity/track record of the institution/partner, and (2) facilities of the institution. The “pull” factor is a dragging/drawing factor such as (1) additional benefits e.g. eco-tourism and other educational trips that can be done in the host country; (2) peace and security in the country/area; and (3) the ease in getting travel documents, etc. Hence, not all academic exchanges can be realized because some challenges/hindrances cannot yet be timely met or not met at all. Government (national and local) and private organization support are therefore necessary requirements in a university’s internationalization effort.

Despite the challenges and considering the advances and successes so far made, the University of the Philippines has been on the track towards productive and beneficial “internationalization”. The University is appropriately positioning itself in the highly competitive global field, gaining academic strengths, collaborators and friends for the benefit of the country.

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