President’s Committee on International Policy

Key Strategic Elements

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The President’s Committee on International Policy submitted the first draft of its Internationalization Report (“the Report”) in May 2017. This document is an overview of the major strategic elements included in the Report.

1. Vision, Objectives, and Principles

Though the University has implemented a number of successful international initiatives over the years, the Committee found that our approach to internationalization to date has been fragmented. To address this, the Committee proposes the adoption of a vision, strategic objectives, and a number of implementation principles.

a) Creating a Transforming Vision

For the University to reach “world-class” status (Mohrman, Ma & Baker 2008), the Committee advocates for the creation of a clear vision on internationalization. This vision should include a commitment to (a) attracting and retaining talented faculty, staff and students, (b) dedicating adequate resources to support internationalization efforts and (c) implementing coherent institutional governance of international activities.

b) Proposed Internationalization Strategy: Objectives

A series of strategic objectives broadly aligned with the University’s Strategic Plan are proposed in the Report. The Committee advocates a shift from quantitative (input and output) approaches (i.e. scorecard metrics) towards a results-based approach. The proposed strategic objectives are as follows:

1. As our society and economy become increasingly knowledge-based, it is vital that internationalization efforts be carefully calibrated for strategic purposes. Global engagement efforts represent a means of transcending knowledge boundaries, expanding academic horizons, and creating new knowledge. These elements should be reflected in the University of Ottawa’s mission and international outlook.

2. Recruit and develop a diverse global community of students and provide the appropriate support services for them, to foster their success and integration in the University community.

3. Provide students with an exceptional experience through international and intercultural learning and research opportunities. Build and sustain a global consciousness to better prepare students to live and work in an increasingly complex international and intercultural environment.

4. Undertake international cutting-edge, interdisciplinary, socially engaged and collaborative international research in areas of the University’s strengths. Enhance recognition and support for international research as an institutional priority and identify strategic international partnerships.

5. Promote the University’s capacity to reflexively engage in international initiatives with government, stakeholder agencies and industry partners in order to address significant issues and challenges around the globe as part of its core mission and a global outlook.
c) Guiding principles
The Committee noted that the success of any strategy ultimately depends on the senior administration’s commitment and leadership, as well as on the capabilities of the management responsible for its execution. With this in mind, the following principles are suggested to guide our approach to internationalization:

1. Internationalization is a process and a means to an end by which the university is better able to achieve its core objectives.
2. Internationalization must be integrated: instead of standing as a separate pillar of university policies and strategies, it should be incorporated into all academic activities, as well as across institutional structures, processes and operations.
3. Internationalization must be geographically focused: given the significant investment in time and resources required in our pursuit of internationalization, we should target specific regions and countries in accordance with our academic and research priorities.
4. Internationalization must be faculty-driven: professors are at the heart of our academic enterprise and play a critical role in internationalization. They also deliver our internationalization strategy and make it real. It should also be noted that each faculty within the University is in a different position when it comes to internationalization, hence plans need to be faculty-specific.
5. We must consider the impact of internationalization on student learning outcomes. Internationalization should benefit our students in the long run through improved global competency, personal, cross-cultural capabilities and employability skills.
6. Our internationalization efforts must enhance the institutional profile and research excellence at the University. Partnerships should be mutually beneficial, enhance our reputation and increase international visibility.
7. Our efforts must be collaborative and engage global partners to advance our core missions of teaching, research and service.

2. Toward a Model of Shared Responsibility
In preparing the Report, the Committee completed a comprehensive literature review on internationalization with a particular focus on potential governance models. In the completion of this exercise, the Committee concluded that, in the pursuit of internationalization, we must a) undergo a significant cultural shift; b) consider a governance model that is decentralized and c) place research at the center of that model.

a) Fostering a Culture of Internationalization
The Committee found that internationalization represents a challenge of external adaptation and internal integration to which the University must adjust. The Report notes that the process of fostering institutional change can be challenging; however, incremental change is possible. Certain hurdles will undoubtedly be encountered due to ingrained organizational practices and entrenched logics, which reinforce the status quo. However, if successfully implemented, a culture of internationalization has the potential to usher in a new age of creativity and innovation at the University.

b) Potential Models
In its analysis of the literature on internationalization, including a review of a major case study by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), the Committee found that research universities tend
towards decentralization as a model for internationalization. It is further noted that successful internationalization efforts should begin at the grassroots level instead of being imposed from central administration. The Committee pulled seven recommendations from the OISE case study with respect to the development of a model, as follows:

1. Acknowledging that funding is crucial for promoting internationalization (via government, public and private stakeholders);
2. Recognizing the difference between high-level institutional and grassroots aspirations;
3. Empowering individual performers for championing strategic initiatives;
4. Continuously monitoring grassroots successes and failures;
5. Engaging grassroots successes in exchange of ideas and planning;
6. Learning how to lead and follow at the same time;
7. Committing to mutual evaluation and periodic adjustments to make decentralization and coordination work effectively (Oleksiyenko 2008).

Furthermore, international initiatives must be closely aligned with knowledge production efforts, learning outcomes and research objectives. As such, faculty-led, research-driven programs are more likely to be successful in the long term.

c) Research
The Task Force’s Summary Report identifies research as “the University’s unifying international stance” (13) and proposes a model for the University’s transformation that puts research as the heart of our internationalization positioning (see Annex 4 of the Summative Report). It is suggested that research can serve as a transformative force in our pursuit of internationalization. The Full Report further recommends that we must harness the strength of existing and emerging research collaborations to foster a culture of internationalization on campus.

3. Restructuring for Internationalization

The Committee found that there is an urgent need for better coordination of internationalization initiatives at the University. The current, highly fragmented, internal structure and approach results in duplication of efforts, decreased productivity, and loss of potential efficiencies. The Committee suggests that the University should make internationalization a “core activity” and ensure that resources are allocated to it.

According to the Committee, what is crucial at this point is the implementation of an effective internationalization structure to support our global strategy. To that end, the Committee recommends that the University:

1. Examine the creation of a senior administrator position to lead the international portfolio. The position would report to the President and oversee and lead the implementation of the University’s International Strategic Plan and advance the institution’s efforts in international research, academic programming, staff and student mobility, program partnerships, service and development, etc.;
2. Reorganize the current International Office and the Office of International Research to create
synergies and maximize resources and productivity;

3. Create consistency across faculties and ensure that academic units are given specific mandates and objectives to achieve true internationalization inside and outside the University;

4. Professionalize the institution by developing job descriptions and performance appraisal tools that are consistent with the University’s internationalization objectives;

5. Relocate power and authority via decentralization when and where required to key stakeholders at faculty and academic units. Improved coordination among stakeholders also is key because the absence of coordinated leadership has inhibited the University’s progress on internationalization.

4. Areas of Focus for Internationalization

According to the Report, the key to success in achieving our goals and vision for our internationalization strategy is to reach all stakeholders, strive for opportunities to link internationalization efforts between various stakeholders, and ensure that the activities are documented, evaluated and communicated across the institution.

The Report proposes several ‘Areas of Focus’ that build on past successes while considering new opportunities for globally-engaged internationalization activities. They are:

a) International student recruitment
The University must continue to actively recruit the best students from around the world. To improve retention and integration, we must enhance student services on campus to better respond to the specific challenges faced by international students. International student recruitment must also be a part of the next strategic plan. The Report cautions that we must preserve and enhance diversity in our international student population at all levels, including linguistic diversity, level of study, academic diversity (currently international student populations are concentrated within a few programs), and cultural diversity (diversifying countries of origin).

b) Education and learning abroad
Students benefit from opportunities to develop global competencies through international research and experiential learning opportunities. Students can also play a vital role in promoting the University and research priorities of the institution through their international interactions. The Report outlines several ways to enhance student applied learning through co-operative education, community service learning, integrated academic mobility, research opportunities, and international internships or volunteering. Beyond these existing programs, the Committee suggests the exploration of additional strategies such as expanding field course options facilitated by faculty members and government programs that facilitate student-learning experiences abroad (volunteering, internships, research, etc.).

c) International research collaboration
According to the Report, we must scale up our existing strategic partnerships and research collaborations. Specific activities to consider include developing regional areas of expertise within the University to deepen networks and collaborations with higher education stakeholder agencies, scholars, researchers and practitioners whose work focuses on those regions. Furthermore, we must make use of
opportunities such as hosting international academic centres or attending international conferences, participating in international consortia and networks, etc. These activities have a positive impact on the University’s reputation and are linked to improved recruitment and retention of international students and faculty members.

d) Comprehensive internationalization

The Centre for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) defines comprehensive internationalization as “a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected” (CIGE 2012, 3).

According to the Committee, expanding the internationalization of our curriculum is central to preparing the next generation of leaders in a globalized world. The University must therefore provide support for curriculum development to ensure that internationalization is facilitated. In addition, resources, strategies and training opportunities must be offered to ensure that existing knowledge of internationalization of the curriculum is diffused more widely on campus.

e) International development and cooperation

The U15 group identifies international development and cooperation as a key priority area in the pursuit of global engagement. With this aim in mind, the Report recommends that we capitalize on our large and growing network of alumni and their presence in countries around the world to facilitate partnership and network building. Strategies to work collaboratively with alumni abroad can also enrich programs for student practicum placements abroad or within their home communities.

f) Faculty participation and leadership in international activities

The Committee cautions that internationalization requires the commitment of a critical mass of faculty who are willing to incorporate an international and comparative perspective into their interactions with students. To capitalize on this, it is suggested that recognition and reward systems be built to identify, support, evaluate and reward faculty participation and leadership in international activities.