Dual, Joint and Other Degree Collaborations: Institutional Issues and Prerequisites

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Prerequisite Framing Questions

- Cross-border degree collaborations can offer substantial value added, intellectually and institutionally, for students and for faculty.
- They also typically pose substantial challenges, costs and time commitments.
- Acquiring satisfactory answers to a set of cost/benefit “framing” questions should precede detailed planning and commitments.
Key Framing Questions for Proposed Cross-Border Degree Collaborations

1. What are the intellectual drivers?
2. Is there an institutional commitment?
3. Do we have the right institutional partner(s)?
4. Will this arrangement support “cross mission” synergies?
5. Will key sectors/authorities support?
What are the Intellectual Drivers?

- Intended learning outcomes.
- Expected research opportunities for students, faculty, or both (if graduate degrees).
- Strengthening key institutional curricula or research thrusts.
- Opportunity for sustained capacity building.
Is there an Institutional Commitment?

- Is the proposed collaboration personality or institutionally driven and supported?
  - Unless organizationally supported on both sides, its birth or its sustainability will be problematic?
  - If personality drive, what is the opportunity to convert personal entrepreneurism to institutional commitment?

- If driven by administrative leaders, is there evidence of commitment from key faculty(ies)?

- What is the likely staying power on the part of all institutions involved?
Do We Have the Right Institutional Partner(s)?

- Are institutional cultures and values
  - Compatible enough to forge a partnership,
  - Flexible enough on both sides to adapt where needed,
  - Open to learning from the outside?

- Is there substantive and pedagogical compatibility in basic aspects of the degree collaboration?

- Will program priorities remain stable at collaborating institutions?
Will this Collaboration Support “Cross Mission” synergies?

- Will this strengthen instructional activity alone, or also research opportunities, faculty collaborations, and/or joint community engagement projects?

- Are cross-mission synergies likely?

- Will the collaboration broaden “active learning” options beyond the classroom (e.g., field research or internships)?
Will Key Sectors/Authorities Support?

- What roles must academic governance play? Is there reasonable prospect of support?
- Will key university service units assist with academic and non-academic student needs?
- Will accreditation bodies support and are they likely to impose conditions that will make the proposed collaboration unworkable?
- Must others approve (e.g., government)
- Is there a market—will students participate!!?
Who Should be Involved?

- During initial talking stages (which administrators and faculty)?
- In the design phase (administrators, faculty, support units)?
- In the approval phase?
- In the implementation and monitoring phases?
Some Basic Design and Accountability Issues
1. Which Structured Options Fit Best?

- Joint degrees.
- Dual or double degrees.
- “Study abroad” options (examples).
  - Semester(s) abroad with transferrable coursework.
  - Supervised field or laboratory research abroad.
  - “Branch” degree programs abroad.
  - Post doctoral appointments or exchanges abroad
  - Cross-border team instruction, courses and programs
- Technology mediated distance learning.
2. Credentialing and Recognition

- Who “certifies” what and how?
- Who issues what?
- Under whose seal(s) or “badge(s)?”
- Nature of the recognition: degrees, diplomas, certificates, transcripts?
- Who is responsible for quality monitoring and assurance?
3. How will Success be Defined? Examples

- Numbers of students participating?
- Student satisfaction/evaluations?
- Faculty assessments?
- Financial viability?
- Student outcome measures?
  - Completion rates
  - Time to completion
  - Student academic performance
  - Employer assessments of graduates
If a decision is made to move forward, what should be covered in a formal agreement?

Elements of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or Agreement
Elements of the MOU

- Brief statement on the:
  - Origins and scope of agreement.
  - Shared purpose, goals, and benefits expected.
- Lead administrative unit and principal contact person on both sides (and for updating these).
- Other key units that will provide necessary services or supports.
- Scope: Categories or types of activities and programs encompassed in the agreement.
Elements of the MOU (continued)

- Legal parameters:
  - Programmatic scope,
  - Limitations and obligations of parties.
  - Financial commitments, obligations and limitations.
    Duration of the initial agreement (e.g., 5 years).

- Provisions for review, renewal, termination.

- Sunset

- Provisions for completing students in the pipeline if the agreement is terminated.
Elements of the MOU (continued)

- General commitment for assessment: dates, outline of a process/criteria.
- Provision for amending the agreement.
- Naming of key institutional policies that will be applicable (e.g., non-discrimination, student rights and responsibilities, and academic policies).
- Signed on both sides by persons with authority to commit the institution.
Additional Issues

- Decisions as to which institution(s) award credit and degrees, and transcript.
- Provisions for faculty periodic review of courses and programs.
- How essential student support services will be delivered, and by whom.
- Assurances that student will have access to essential faculty, courses, and materials.
Additional Issues (continued)

Which institution(s) and units have primary responsibility for

- admissions,
- advising,
- monitoring and evaluating student progress,
- taking academic actions (e.g., admission, probation, dismissal, certification of completion of requirements).

Provisions related to availability and administration of student financial support.
Challenges and Potential Pitfalls

- Finding and sustaining institutional support resources.
  - Most degree collaborations are labor intensive.
  - Few if any can be self-financing.
  - External contracts and grants are difficult to sustain.
  - Most outside grant or other support mechanisms will require institutional soft and/or hard match.

- Are there or will there evolve expectations that tuition (and other costs) will be discounted.
Challenges and Potential Pitfalls (cont’d)

- Achieving symmetry in exchanges.
- Staying power in moving through the labyrinths of setting up the dual/joint degree.
- Sustaining long-run administrative and faculty support.
- Sustaining access to key courses and services needed from units outside the department.
- Insufficient student language skills sufficient for classroom survival (particularly oral and listening).
Challenges and Potential Pitfalls (cont’d)

- Meeting ancillary student costs (e.g., travel, housing, living abroad, and other needs).

- Reducing the levels of “academic parochialism:
  - We do it this way, they do it that way, our way is the only acceptable way.
  - Unwillingness to consider how differing requirements might be rationalized.)

- Making reasonable exceptions to institutional policies (e.g., credit transfer limits, course equivalencies, residency requirements, guidance committee composition).
Challenges and Potential Pitfalls (cont’d)

- Surviving inevitable changes of institutional leadership.
- Knowing when and how to modify, phase out, or terminate the collaborations.
- Designing and building an integrated joint or dual degree experience, rather than one merely glued together at the edges (at the points of handovers).