

CONTINUING TO BUILD A “GLOBAL PENN STATE”

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Abstract

There is no doubt that the current and potential trends in the global higher education arena are mainly based on objective factors originating from rapidly increasing internationalization processes in higher education. From this point of view, higher education is characterized as one of the spheres mostly influenced by globalization – a phenomenon that fundamentally changed a general political, economic, ideological and cultural picture of the world during the last five decades. I do believe that globalization and internationalization in higher education are mutually connected and interdependent categories.

Obviously, the majority of world universities have always had an international focus as part of their general mission or long-term development strategy. The scope and level of this focus depends on each institution's main mission, capacity and ambition in terms of providing academic services abroad, getting more international students and having more sustained positions in international higher education market. Universities develop their internationalization strategies in order to have a framework for adaptation to new global trends and regional challenges as well as to benefit from opportunities coming from globalized and more liberalized international higher education market.

In this regard, my paper mainly deals with Penn State's strong international focus and ongoing efforts to become a Global University. I am applying selected organizational theories and concepts to review Penn State's administration mechanism in international affairs and this flagship university's global presence in general. The theories are loose and tight coupling, natural and rational systems, the Mathew effect, and population ecology, I use these theories to cover Penn State's university management system in terms of getting *globally engaged*, making students *inter-culturally competent*, and preparing *global citizens*.

Key words: higher education, globalization, internationalization, administration mechanism, university management system.

JEL classification: I23, I24

Global Penn State

Penn State’s overall global affairs and perspective international presence is based on two main concepts. So, “Enhancing Global Engagement” and “Fostering and Embracing a Diverse World” have been stated in the list of six foundations in Penn State’s Strategic Plan for 2016-2020 (Penn State University, 2016). Additionally, the quote from Dr. Nicholas Jones, Executive Vice President and Provost, clearly mentions Penn State’s vision on global affairs.

“Penn State will be recognized as a global leader in learning, discovery, and engagement that fosters innovation, embraces diversity in all its forms, and inspires achievement that will change the world in positive and enduring ways” (Jones, 2015).

The University’s international affairs related activities are incorporated under *Global Penn State*. It is characterized by the combination of centralized and decentralized offices throughout the main campus and the commonwealth campuses throughout Pennsylvania. The University Office of Global Programs (UOGP) is the central unit that provides support and oversight for all of Penn State’s international engagements. At the same time, almost all colleges and campuses have their own international programs offices (or coordinators) intended for development of global affairs of a particular college and campus.

Loose Coupling

According to Weick (1976) loose coupling is generally used within higher education research to discuss the loose ties between units within the organization (p. 4). From this point of view, Penn State’s university administration in global affairs include “potentially crucial properties of the ‘glue’ that holds organization together” (Weick, 1976, p. 3).

UOGP, overseen by the Vice Provost for Global Programs, manages education abroad programs, hosts international students and scholars, and facilitates the University's international partnerships around the world. This quote from the Global Penn State webpage identifies UOGP’s main role and its functioning areas.

“UOGP's mission is to vigorously promote Penn State's vision of becoming a truly global university -- the Global Penn State -- by providing the resources and support needed to: expand the diversity of our study abroad enterprise; increase and diversify our international student population; and build transformative, strategic partnerships around the world. UOGP encourages all members of the Penn State community to incorporate global perspectives in their work, studies, and activities.

Therefore, we offer a comprehensive range of international and intercultural educational opportunities for University faculty, staff, and students alike” (Global Penn State, 2016).

The international program offices (or coordinators) functioning within each college manage similar activities independently from the UOGP. For instance, an associate dean for international programs at Smeal College of Business oversees global opportunities to internationalize the education for Smeal students. “This encompasses managing existing and creating new international business courses, study abroad programs, international internships, and other occasions to internationalize the curriculum” (Smeal College of Business, 2016). In this case, referring to “...(2) occasions when any one of several means will produce the same end;...(7) actual causal independence;...(10) decentralization;...” (Weick, 1976, p. 5), we may argue that these offices are loosely coupled with UOGP.

The arguments systemized by Weick (1976) as “Potential Functions and Dysfunctions of Loose Coupling” (p. 6) allows us to provide more detailed explanation on this loosely coupled system. The first function based on *less probability of organization’s respond to each little change in the environment* is completely applicable in our case. So, any changes in administrative staff of International Programs in the College of Education will have almost no influence on UOGP and Penn State’s global affairs in general. In other words, being a loosely coupled system, Penn State’s administration mechanism in global affairs is very stable and less sensitive to little changes that occur within colleges.

Weick’s (1976) third function focuses on “localized adaptation” and eligibility to “modify a local unique contingency without affecting the whole system” (pp. 6-7) in a loosely coupled system. Additionally, such adaptations are supposed to be efficient and substantial. Application of this function shows that the international programs offices within colleges or colleges themselves are very flexible in terms of easily adjusting to local environment. For instance, the new strategic plan approved by the College of the Liberal Arts includes a special *Global experience* section, and this quote from that plan introduces the priorities of the particular College.

“In the next five years, we seek to increase participation in study abroad to 700 students per year, and to secure participation in either internship abroad or study abroad experiences by at least three-quarters of our 2000 graduates. To do this we are increasing financial support for global experiences...We are also planning to hire a coordinator of global experiences in the Career Enrichment Network who will facilitate global experiences for our undergraduates both on campus and abroad” (College of the Liberal Arts, 2016).

It clearly shows that for a separate college it is not difficult to decide on global perspectives, and to hire a staff member to implement the relevant activities. According to my personal communications to some staff members, I may argue that, these are very difficult and more time-intensive for UOGP.

The fifth function argues that a breakdown in one element of a loosely coupled system does not affect other elements of the organization (Weick, 1976, p. 7). It means if a problem (decrease of international students, lack of funds for study abroad, disagreement on extension of existing student exchange agreement with foreign partner institution, etc.) occurred in one of the colleges it does not negatively influence the central office and other colleges. However, I have to mention a *dysfunction* component also, by referring to Weick’s (1976) statement: “A loosely coupled system can isolate its trouble spots and prevent the trouble from spreading, but it should be difficult for the loosely coupled system to repair the defective element.” (p. 7). I will argue that it will be very difficult, expensive, and time-prohibitive for an individual college to solve a problem and to recover on its own without direct support from the central administration.

Global affairs within a college or campus is implemented as an integral part of educational, research, and administrative management process in that particular college and campus. In other words, the international program offices within Penn State’s colleges and campuses are much more academic-related and their activities include more active participation of students, faculty, and staff. In contrast, the UOGP is just a service unit that has no direct academic content, and it focuses on providing administrative support as a *common umbrella* for overall global affairs. This approach makes it a bit difficult to coordinate all global affairs in the university level. This argument is completely supported by Weick (1976) who believes that it takes time and money to coordinate people in a loosely coupled system (p. 8). Administrators responsible for international programs offices in colleges report directly to college deans or campus chancellors. It is logical as those programs are directly financed mainly by college dean or campus chancellor. In other words, there is a tightly coupling system within colleges and campuses.

There is no regulation or mandatory mechanism for a direct reporting from colleges and campuses to UOGP or Vice Provost for Global Programs. Plus, different colleges are not well connected or not well mutually informed. Sometimes, it is difficult to produce university statistics on issues like study abroad, incoming and outgoing scholars, joint research collaborations, and other partnerships. In this regard, UOGP is currently working on a new centralized data-base system (to be launched in November 2016) that will serve as a forum between central and decentral administration on global affairs.

Matthew Effect

It is a clear fact that the *global affairs* component has already become one of the crucial and decisive factors defining, characterizing, and describing Penn State's general perception locally (in-state), nationally, and internationally. This fact is fundamentally changing Penn State's philosophy on successful higher educational institutions in the 21st century. From this point of view, the statement made by Dr. Michael Adewumi, Penn State's Vice Provost for Global Programs, is quite clear and purpose-oriented.

"...We recognize that we live in a very small global village. The challenges are we faced today, as humanity, have no longer at local, they are global in perspective. The global engagement network is a network of strategic partners that could provide our students critique experience that they need to be more global in the perspectives and to become more competitive globally..." (Adewumi, 2015).

This description is completely supported by Penn State's Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, which mentions that "...An enhanced focus on global engagement is central to our mission in the 21st century, reinforcing our mission to offer students opportunities to become global citizens and providing a vehicle for Penn State's impact to be extended around the world..." (Penn State University, 2016). It means, having such an importance and big attention, Penn State's global affairs getting a significant chance to create "a kind of 'virtuous circle' in which advantage begets advantage" (Trow, 1984, p. 149).

According to Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, *Global Penn State* includes enhancing global competencies by sending students, faculty, and staff abroad; internationalizing the University by bringing non-U.S.-born students and scholars to its campuses; and establishing a global network of partnerships that enables the University to pursue its mission worldwide (Penn State University, 2016). In other words, strong global focus supports Penn State's international presence that makes it more attractive to international students. I do believe that increased international demand for Penn State "increases excess demand and the opportunity for selectivity, and therefore for future student quality" (Winston, 1999, p. 24). In fact, Penn State's international student body has increased 86%, reaching 8,225 students in Fall 2014 from 4,421 students in Fall 2009 (Jones, 2015). I have to note that in this period the number of international undergraduate students increased about three times, reaching 5,365 from 1,947.

International students play an increasingly important role in the overall increase of the University revenues. Here, as Trow (1984) mentions, Penn State's increased revenue may be characterized as a next *advantage beget by other advantage* (p. 149). Similarly, a study abroad component also gets more support

both from UOGP and colleges. As a result, in the 2013-14 academic year 2,581 Penn State students benefited from study abroad opportunities that is higher than Big Ten’s average indicator of 2,046 students.

Logically, a continued increase in the number of international students, study abroad programs, and the university revenues positively influence the overall quality of Penn State’s academic and research performance as well as creating a more favorable campus environment in terms of “producing” globally competent professionals. I think, all these factors improve Penn State’s image by raising its general prestige and strengthening its elite institution status as a part of the Big Ten. It is followed by a significant increase of interest in Penn State from domestic and international visiting scholars. They are unique recourse in terms of bringing new ideas and perspectives, improving the curricula, and creating a truly multicultural higher education environment (Trow, 1984, p. 151). For instant, Penn State hosts 10-15 Hubert H. Humphrey Fellows every year who represent completely different higher education systems. In 2015-16, ten Humphrey Fellows representing nine countries bring their expertise to Penn State, and in turn they benefit from professional development focused opportunities offered by Penn State. Additionally, Penn State receives on average eight-ten Fulbright scholars per year. According to Trow (1984), visiting scholars “come because the leading universities have the marginal resources, the research centers, the distinguished scholars, and the whom visitors want to see and spend time with” (p. 151).

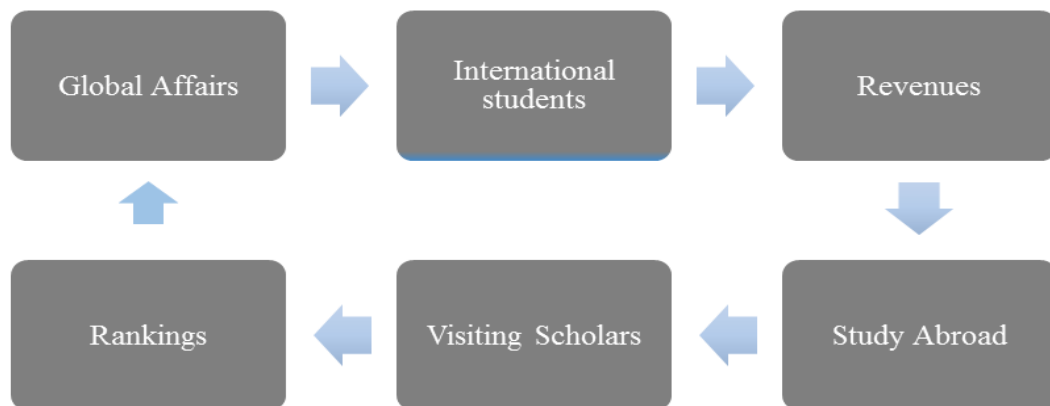


Diagram 1. The Matthew Effect of Penn State’s Global Affairs

Being part of the mechanisms under Trow's "virtuous circle", Penn State's global affairs and international partnerships are also positively influenced by international students and scholars as well as study abroad programs. It resulted in the Global Engagement Network (GEN) that is the core component of Penn State's strategy for globalization. GEN is a "network of strategic partnerships peer institutions around the world that share Penn State's commitment to solving the world's most pressing challenges through a multi-layered engagement of research, faculty, and student collaboration" (Global Penn State, 2016).

GEN expands access to regional networks of intellectual capital, resources, and funding, and it provides opportunities for student engagement that builds global citizenship and leadership. More importantly, GEN leverages Penn State's intellectual resources with those of other major research universities around the world. All these enable Penn State to address major global challenges like energy, global health, food security, ecological problems, and economic sustainability (Global Penn State, 2016). Of course, all of the global affairs related issues are directly promoting Penn State's international image and global university ranking primarily connected with both the quality of faculty (Trow, 1984) and the quality of students (Winston, 1999).

According to Institute for International Education (IIE), the total number of international students in the world was 4.5 million in 2014. There is a five times increase between 1975 and 2014, and the total number doubled during last decade. More importantly, the U.S. hosted 22% of those 4.5 million students worldwide who are pursuing higher education outside their home countries (2015 Project Atlas, 2016). Penn State is playing an important role in above-mentioned increase of share of the U.S. on the one hand. And on the other hand, Penn State is getting highly influenced from the continued process of internationalization in higher education. Penn State has concluded 230 partnership agreements so far, where 104 are active, and 53 are truly active.

Rational and natural systems

The structure of central university unit shows that UOGP is totally formalized. In this regard, we may characterize it as a "rational system" in general. Directorate of International Student & Scholar Advising, Directorate of Education Abroad, and Directorate of Student Engagement & Operations are UOGP's main subunits that directly report to Vice Provost for Global Programs. Additionally, acting separately under UOGP, Global Finance & Business manager, Global Engagement Network director, Campus Engagement director, and Strategic Initiatives director also report to the Vice Provost. There is a clear reporting and coordination system within the UOGP. All staff members [I interviewed Dr. Michael Adewumi, Vice Rector for

Global Programs (23 March 2016); Jennifer Campbell, Director of Student Engagement and Operations (04 April 2016); Dr. Sylvester Osagie, Director of Campus Engagement (11 April 2016); Dr. Martin Trethewey, Director of Global Engagement Network (19 April 2016); Brian Brubaker, Director of Education Abroad (22 April 2016)] at UOGP, whom I interviewed for writing this paper, made me completely agree with Scott and Davis (2007) who argue that “a structure is formalized to the extent that the rules governing behavior are precisely and explicitly formulated and to the extent that roles and role relations are prescribed independently of the personal attributes and relations of individuals occupying positions in the structure” (p. 37).

However, Penn State’s organization model of global affairs includes *goal complexity* when we take it into account as a general system covering UOGP, all commonwealth campuses and colleges. This point adds more *natural system* approach. Of course, all academic units intend to address global affairs related challenges that incorporate combination of Penn State’s general goals defined in UOGP framework and the goals based on particular unit’s own development strategy. It can be explained by referencing to Scott and Davis (2007) who note the importance of paying more attention to *behavior* and “the complex interconnections between the normative and the behavioral structures of organizations (p. 60).

This approach is more relevant and vivid for academic units that do not have a separate formal international programs office. It adds informal structure perspective to entire global affairs system, and Scott and Davis (2007) also mention these informal structures are mainly based on personal characteristics and relations of the specific participants (p. 62). I think this was the main reason for the different responses from staff members working in the same unit to my questions about their college’s priorities in terms of global affairs.

Population ecology

Universities have always been affected by international trends and to a certain degree operated within a broader international community of academic institutions, scholars, and research. A Report prepared for the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education defines internationalization in higher education as the variety of policies and programs that universities and governments implement to respond to globalization (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

These responses mainly include sending students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas, or engaging in some type of inter-institutional partnership. In other words, internationalization in higher education created completely new environment within universities that motivated different departments, centers and institutes “scan the relevant environment for opportunities and threats, formulate

strategic responses, and adjust organizational structure appropriately” (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 930). This argument is completely relevant in the case of Penn State.

Penn State has decided to adapt these fundamental changes in entire higher education environment by specifying *the Global Penn State* idea as its ultimate destination in UOGP’s Strategic Plan for 2014-2019 (Global Penn State, 2013). Penn State’s Vice Provost for Global Programs Dr. Adewumi believes that their three-sided approach of *Go, Come, and Partner* [*Go*: Expand and diversify our Study Abroad offerings; *Come*: Increase and diversify international students and scholars; *Partner*: Build transformational partnerships around the world] provides an efficient mechanism to transform Penn State into a truly global university. It requires the integration of global perspectives into Penn State’s academic programs (research and education) at the fundamental level, and faculty engagement is considered to be the key factor in this process. Currently, Penn State is well positioned to collaborate with its strategic partners around the world in addressing some of the major global challenges (Global Penn State, 2013).

I believe that in Penn State’s case the structural inertia is not too high. This argument is based on factors like *legal and fiscal barriers*, as well as *internal and legitimacy constraints* (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 932). More precisely, there is no legal and political barriers in terms of Penn State’s efforts to get more international students. Or, we do not see any fundamental internal constraints from faculty, students, and campus community braking Penn State’s study abroad strategy. Plus, Penn State’s internationalization-focused adaptation policy does not violate the legitimacy claims. All these factors make Penn State to look for the adaptation of the internationalization environment. However, it is obvious that *collective rationality or general equilibria* (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 932) generates structural inertia for Penn State. It can be explained that the common strategy on getting more international partnerships is not efficient on the same level for the College of Engineering (more globally focused) and the College of Education (more nationally focused). Summarizing, *external pressures towards inertia* (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 932) played an important role in Penn State’s adaptation to the mentioned environment.

Of course, the adaptation process is centrally managed by the UOGP. Currently, UOGP is focusing on realization of the vision of making Penn State a world leader in scholarship and international engagements. Achieving this goal will make global engagement the standard operating practice of the university and a staple ingredient in teaching, research, and service. According to UOGP’s Strategic Plan for 2014-2019, “...the role of UOGP will simply become that of supporting the academic units. When this happens, Penn State will have transformed itself into a truly 21st Century Global Land-grant University” (Global Penn State, 2013). We

may conclude that Penn State has a clear vision in terms of adaptation to the mentioned environment in a macro level, and it makes Penn State to be isomorphic to global higher education environment. Of course, isomorphism is mainly accompanied by a criterion of selection and by a competition theory (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 939).

Simply saying, Penn State tries to be selected in by global higher education environment where extremely high competition exists. Penn State’s main expectation is to become more efficient institution by getting more tools and opportunities, in other words, to optimize itself as an organization. Of course, Penn State’s decision is fully supported by Hannah & Freeman (1977) who believes that “[f]rom a population ecology perspective, it is the environment which optimizes” (p. 932). We may claim that, for now, Penn State is still in the process of selection by other organizations being a part of global higher education environment. And Penn State faces continuously growing competition from “already globalized” HEIs who are playing a leading role in creation of new global trends and in designing perspective architecture of global higher education. It makes difficult Penn State to compete with them and it increases risks for implementation of Penn State’s internationalization strategy successfully. This situation can be explained by argument offered by Hannah & Freeman (1977) who suggest that “[o]rganizational forms presumably fail to flourish in certain environmental circumstances because other forms successfully compete with them for essential resources” (p. 940).

As a result, Penn State is getting a completely new environment within the university that requires corresponding changes in internal units. In other words, we are getting another environment within Penn State which we may call *Global Penn State environment*. It is completely different from the above-mentioned global higher education environment. Global Penn State environment is much more complicated due to Penn State’s current decentralized university administration mechanism.

In general, we may argue that campuses, colleges, and departments are non-isomorphic to entire Penn State. All units may be too independent and it allows them not to follow all university-level strategies or centrally implemented initiatives. It means, it is very difficult to talk about selection in this environment. Logically, we have less competition among different units who are loosely coupled to each other.

However, some units (Penn State Harrisburg, College of Agriculture, College of Engineering, Smeal College of Business, Department of Economics) may be considered to be isomorphic to entire university in case of Global Penn State environment. These units have own international offices or separate staff member authorized to deal with global affairs. They get more international students and visiting scholars compare with other campuses and colleges. They have more working

international partnerships covering student and faculty exchange as well as joint research collaborations. Because of this nature, the mentioned units (organizations) try to get adapted to changes happening in Global Penn State environment.

Ecological model of competition states the nature of the population growth process and this model considers “the idea that resources available at any moment for each form of organization are finite and fixed” (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 941). In this regard, even in the less-isomorphic organizational structure, different organizations (Penn State’s units) compete for resources offered by UOGP and at the end “[e]ach population occupies a distinct niche” (Hannah & Freeman, 1977, p. 947).

Conclusion

Application of different organization theories allowed to generalize implementation of Penn State’s internationalization efforts those intended to create a truly global university. Penn State’s distinct university administration mechanism represents loosely coupled organizations (units), both rational and natural systems, as well as populations mostly non-isomorphic to entire institution. At the same time, Penn State’s internationalization strategy, implemented by UOGP, directly and indirectly impacts on different areas like international students, visiting scholars, revenues, and global image. My main conclusion is that UOGP and any other central administration office is not able to force any campus, college or department to get more international partnerships or to engage more actively in overall global affairs.

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