

**Cultural Due Diligence  
And the Management of  
International Campuses by U.S. Institutions**

By: Stephen G. Wright  
Assistant Professor of Management

An unwillingness or lack of knowledge concerning cultural due diligence is one of the most egregious errors in the management of foreign campuses by U.S. based institutions. To my knowledge there has not been a working definition that can be applied to higher education specifically as to what cultural due diligence is. In order to create a viable starting point I offer the following, based upon my research in organizational behavior:

Cultural Due Diligence (C.D.D.) is an integrated and detailed survey of cultural variables that define and effect a working relationship. Positive and negative aspects of how a partner culture can impact an institution in relation to how the home culture impacts the partner must be thoroughly examined and planed for. The overall outcome of such examination is the creation and maintenance of a “third culture” relationship.

One key element to C.D.D. is the willingness to extract information that defines how you can be used by the partner through cultural issues and conversely how you can use them. Keep in mind that the word “used” can be applied in a positive and negative way. It has been my professional observation that cultural over sensitivity by many Western colleges and universities is being used (negative connotation) by partners in international campuses.

Using culture as a method to cheat, undermine or direct the operations of parent institutions can be mitigated by implementing three simple and direct strategies. I propose that these strategies should be voluntarily adopted by institutions, and / or required by accrediting bodies in the United States.

**1) Random Core Competency Verification Exams (C.V.E.)**

Exams, in the core curriculum, from professors at the home campus are selected at random, on randomly selected years for evaluation. These exams should be midterm or final exams. Assuming that core competencies required in Economics 101, for example, are generally the same in Virginia as in Beijing, then students in both campuses should achieve scores that are within the same range. The exams that come from the home campus should be delivered to personnel representing the home campus only. In numerous culture groups it is considered okay to “help” students achieve good grades by sharing information considered critical to that end result. The objective here is to verify that what students learn from one college campus is reasonably the same at the international counterpart.

## **2) Home Nation Administrative Requirement**

If an American institution has the intention that the partner / branch campus must fully reflect the U.S. institution it would be reasonable to have administration from the home nation, not the host nation. Administration by people without direct, long-term exposure to American administration methods is a recipe for failure. All administrative ranks, including Registrar, should be from the United States. This would include Dean of Academics, Assistant or Associate Deans and Department Chair. Support functions can be local hires. Many may say that it is difficult to find the number of qualified people needed to go to foreign nations. Some, who are rather financially focused, will say that it is just more cost effective to hire locals for administrative posts. A core question remains constant; do you want academic integrity, quality of program oversight and continuity with the home campus policies, procedures and accreditation requirements? A current turn on C.D.D. is the legal requirement for localization of staff. A counter-argument is that an American institution requires American educated administrative staff. Local staff, consciously or subconsciously, represents a local management perspective.

## **3) Faculty Recruitment Criteria**

In this case continuity to American models of teaching and attainment of learning outcomes must be addressed. A quota of 55% to 60% of all full-time faculty at in international campus should be from the United States. Any person that has earned at least two degrees in the United States (Bachelor / Masters – Masters / Doctorate) can be included in the faculty quota. If you are promoting an American degree, or learning experience, how can it be realistically justified with a core faculty that is predominantly local?

Cultural Due Diligence is more than just understanding another culture. It must be a deeply researched plan that anticipates the cause and effect relationship of different cultures with a goal toward creating a “third culture”. By this is meant that the two distinct, apparently different, cultures find a foundation upon which to create a unified vision and educational environment.

You can seek short-term opportunity and profit, or you can realize long-term gain, name recognition and profit by reinforcing academic integrity. Your students are your reputation and “milling” them out without a verifiable level of education serves only to undermine the quality of their future and yours.

Discussion and comments may be sent to: [proftype@live.com](mailto:proftype@live.com)