

# Issues, Ideas and Ideologies

## Higher Education's Role in Globalization

By: Lee T. Todd, Jr., President  
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*Providing an international comfort level is a new challenge for universities. Our role of preparing young people for work life has gone global.*

The first time I traveled outside the United States was for a business trip, which was an entirely new experience for many in my generation. Business travel generally took people to places like New York, San Francisco, or Atlanta. Most members of my generation ventured abroad for pleasure, not commerce.

Time – and technology – changed that. Today's college graduates are entering a new marketplace, or as author Thomas Friedman calls it in *The World Is Flat*, a flatter world. Your customer may very well be in Cairo; your boss in Bangkok; your product in Paris.

Globalization is upon us and universities need to prepare their students accordingly. Colleges and universities must be focused on improving our students' global competency, providing our next generation of leaders with the ability to think critically – to think globally – in all situations.

### **Developing Global Skills Abroad**

Education is the process of removing barriers. One barrier I faced during my

business career was international travel. Having never left the United States, I was anxious the first time I went abroad. After the first time of passing through customs and experiencing a nation's processes, I was comfortable.

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The challenges that face our young people are vastly different than what we have seen in the past. Our children and grandchildren will be working in an international marketplace, conversing, collaborating, and competing with people from various cultures.

For our students to better understand their coworkers – or their competition – they first have to know them.

We at the University of Kentucky have accepted that challenge by encouraging more of our students to experience an international education. We started with our study abroad program. Last spring the UK Board of Trustees approved a measure that I hope will provide

greater study abroad access to more of our students. Each full-time student pays a \$2 per semester fee, with those funds being used to expand study abroad scholarship programs. We hope the UK study abroad scholarship fund will make international study and travel more accessible to larger segments of our student body.

Study abroad has been an essential university program for decades. It has offered scores of college students the opportunity to immerse themselves in new cultures. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, though, study abroad will take on a whole new level of importance.

Just this month, the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program asked Congress and the President to pass a \$50 million study abroad scholarship program, which will dramatically increase funding for opportunities abroad for our students. Noting the imbalance between the 191,000 U.S. students who go abroad, versus the 500,000 international students who come to the United States to study,

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this Commission would like to see the number of students going abroad increase to one million over the next decade, especially in the geographic areas traditionally underrepresented in study abroad (non-western Europe) as well as in underrepresented academic majors (science and engineering). As the Commission notes, “Broader global awareness among America’s future leaders will, in turn, lead to more effective U.S. foreign policy, greater security from terrorism, and economic resilience in the increasingly competitive world of trade.”

Douglas Daft, chairman and CEO of the Coca-Cola Company, has said that understanding and valuing different cultures is “an absolute imperative for anyone who works in the Coca-Cola Company.” Clearly, experience outside the United States – and the understanding of world cultures – will be a crucial factor for students entering the job market.

#### **And At Home**

I experienced the flattening of the world before the term “world economy” was vogue. Having created two worldwide technology companies in Kentucky, my business experience was different than every other company I encountered in the Bluegrass. In fact, I never sold or licensed a product to a company in Kentucky. Most of my clients were international corporations. I often found myself in Singapore, Dubai,

or Tokyo closing business deals. What I quickly noticed was that my international clients knew a great deal more about my country than I did about theirs.

While I constantly strived to discover more about world cultures, I do not believe the young people of tomorrow will have the same luxury. Global competency will be a prerequisite in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. Graduates will have to enter the global economy with a greater understanding of world history, international cultural experiences, and knowledge of at least one other language.

That development of cultural understanding must start at colleges and universities. At UK, we are in the process of strategically aligning our academic programs so that we can offer a more comprehensive education better suited for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our Gatton College of Business and Economics has looked outside the United States to improve its educational offerings. The college recently launched a Global Scholars Program, a highly selective curriculum that prepares students to be world-ready – ready to compete and collaborate with anyone, anytime, anywhere; ready to find the opportunities in changing world markets; and ready to become part of the next generation of global business leaders. The four-year program grooms students to

think globally from the moment they step foot on campus. During their first two years in the program, students enroll in leadership and business courses that provide them with greater knowledge of the global marketplace. In their junior year, the students participate in a study abroad program. During their senior year, our global scholars prepare for the transition from college to professional life, taking a pair of courses designed to apply what they have learned throughout the program.

We are also reviewing our general education requirements for our undergraduate students. Called the University Studies Program (USP), the curriculum has served the purpose of providing a liberal arts core to our students for more than a decade. Having entered a new century, with new hopes and dreams for our graduates, we needed to offer our students an appropriate curriculum that will prepare them for their new challenges.

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### Bringing the World to the Bluegrass

Internationalizing the campus is not a one-way street. As important as study abroad programs are, cultural awareness is born from shared experience at our home campuses.

International students play an integral role at our universities, providing our campuses with diversity of thought, culture, and languages. Universities must continue to open their doors to international undergraduates, graduate students, and post-doctoral appointees. In this post 9-11 world, that challenge is only getting harder. Since 9-11 international student enrollment has been down across the United States as many international scholars have struggled to obtain student visas. We have been fortunate to maintain our international enrollment at UK, due mainly to our strong graduate programs. However, increasing international enrollment is an issue universities need to address with our federal legislators and U.S. diplomats.

One way we can frame that conversation is by illustrating the economic impact international students have upon our communities. It is estimated that international students and their dependents contributed \$12.87 billion to the U.S. economy in 2003-04, according to NAFSA: Association of International Educators. In Kentucky, international students pumped more than \$81

million into the economy. Those attending the University of Kentucky contributed more than \$22 million.

Many international students are choosing to stay in the United States once they graduate. The Economist.com recently reported that from 1998-2001 “about two-thirds of foreigners who earned an American doctorate in science and engineering said they had ‘firm plans’ to stay, up from 57 percent in 1994-97.”

Once here, international students and graduates provide communities with new ideas and innovations, many of which can be commercialized locally. Once exchange students arrive in the United States, our culture of entrepreneurship often translates into business and, ultimately, job creation.

We have a great example of international entrepreneurship at the University of Kentucky. While enjoying dinner at a fast food restaurant near campus, four Indian graduate students realized that there are no Indian-inspired fast food restaurants. The students collaborated with UK business college students and developed a business plan. The group then teamed up with a UK alumnus with 27 years of executive experience in the fast food industry.

Indi-Go Inc. was born. The fast food restaurant serves

healthy, authentic Indian food in American style. Indi-Go spent a semester honing its recipes, testing menu items at one of our campus dining halls. The company is currently seeking funding to open its first restaurant.

International students studying in the United States also make lifelong contacts that can form the foundation for future collaboration and potential business opportunities. Thomas Friedman identifies the phenomenon in his bestseller, *The World Is Flat*: “An Indian student who is educated at the University of Oklahoma and then gets his first job with a software firm in Oklahoma City forges bonds of trust and understanding that are really important for future collaboration, even if he winds up returning to India.”

Such collaboration is important as Kentucky increases its role in the global economy. According to the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development, “Kentucky’s companies are quickly becoming competitive players in the global marketplace. Kentucky is ranked first for the exporting of livestock and livestock products. Exports to foreign countries contribute over \$10 billion annually to Kentucky’s economy. This provides 47,400 direct jobs, 35,400 indirect jobs and 38,300 induced jobs for a total of 121,100 jobs in Kentucky that are sustained by exports.”



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UK must also work alongside our foreign investors to add value to their operations. International companies have a significant impact on the Kentucky economy. International investors operate 350 facilities in the Commonwealth, employing 70,000 Kentuckians. International business has an \$8.5 billion impact on Kentucky's economy.

#### **In Closing**

In the future, when a UK graduate logs on to a marketing meeting in Moscow from an Internet café in Ashland, whether or not they are able to contribute depends on what we do today.

Globalization is here and it is rapidly growing. Meetings like the one I just mentioned are happening now and will be more prevalent for our children and grandchildren. As Kentucky's flagship university, we have two options: We can prepare our students for a worldwide economy by helping develop their global competency or; we can pick up the crumbs of the new economy.

We choose the former.