

# Internationalization at YSU

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## INTRODUCTION

This overview of international activities at YSU was originally presented at the University's Diversity Council in April 2006, at which time it was unanimously endorsed. The recommendations should eventually make their way to the president and others for further consideration.

The intention of this updated version is to stimulate and commence a conversation at YSU on the state of international activities. Should the university have more of an international focus and mandate? What are the advantages and disadvantages? How can we more effectively expose our students to international issues and experiences? How can we better take advantage of the international faculty already at the university? What programs, activities and courses already exist? How should we bring together all of the disparate activities, personalities, interests and opportunities into coherent documents, strategies, an Internet presence, conferences, workshops and other tangible efforts that will make this university an attractive option for students in the region and elsewhere? In sum, how can (or rather, should) the university re-invent its mandate, taking into consideration its past while looking toward the future, by closely examining the pivotal international context which is having a significant direct and indirect impact on YSU and the broader community?

One last point that may be of relevance in providing a rationale and some context for the motivation for this initiative. I am from Toronto, Canada, and spent two years as a foreign student in France in the early 1980s, an experience that helped shape my thinking up until now. Similarly, while undertaking my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto in the early 1990s, my most memorable and important learning, I still believe, came from the contact I enjoyed with students from around the globe. So, I am biased toward a greater international understanding and experience. Why did I come here, a question I have often been asked, can only be answered one way: "Why *not* here?".

## BACKGROUND

- Less than one percent of YSU students are from a foreign country.
- It would appear that little or no outreach is being undertaken to connect with foreign students. For example, there is no YSU website specifically designed to attract, inform, recruit and, generally, cater to the needs of foreign students.
- Similarly, there does not appear to be any mentoring program in place for foreign students.
- It should be noted that these students pay out-of-state tuition rates, without access to financial aid,

thus allowing the university to expand his services for American students. There seems to be the general misperception that foreign students cost the university money, and also that they may be taking the place of American students.

- Foreign students, particularly those in mathematics at the graduate level, are fulfilling a pivotal academic function, assisting in the teaching and mentoring of students.
- There is no doubt that foreign students enrich the educational experience for everyone involved. Local students are exposed to real-life experience with different cultures, languages, religions, life-styles, and ways of thinking. Higher learning requires open and critical reflection of the world around us.
- There does not appear to be any coherent vision for internationalization in the curriculum at YSU. It goes without saying that several or many professors are interested in this area, and that they do teach about it, but there is no systematic, formal approach to providing a well-rounded, liberal arts education with a substantive international component.
- It is unclear what foreign-study exchange possibilities are available and are promoted. The *Jambar* recently reported only 7 YSU students were involved in study-abroad programs this past year, a number that is low in comparison with similar institutions in the region.
- There does not appear to be a clearinghouse (the International Programs Centre is certainly well-positioned) for documenting, facilitating and marshalling the resources to have regular study-trips abroad and other international experiences.
- It is unclear how much funding is available at YSU for international activities.
- Internationalization also includes inviting guest speakers, lecturers and dignitaries from abroad. Learning about the world from those in other countries would be an indispensable learning experience.
- If YSU does not embark on the internationalization train, so to speak, many other universities in the vicinity and throughout the nation will. Some universities are extremely well known for their study-abroad programs as well as a more international curriculum.
- Not unimportantly, the presence of foreign students and scholars uniquely enhances the diversity quotient and component of the university. The world is getting smaller, and there is a need to reach out, understand, connect with and develop *bone fide* collaborative partnerships and relationships with others.
- Other universities in the region have established programs related to international activities (including

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substantial study-abroad opportunities, faculty resources, host-family programs), which are well documented on a clearly visible web presence:

- o *Kent University* <http://www.kent.edu/campuslife/CulturalOpportunities/International-Student-Programs.cfm#host>
  - o *University of Akron* <http://www.uakron.edu/oip/>
  - o *Bowling Green State University* <http://international.bgsu.edu/>
  - o *Cleveland State University* <http://www.csuohio.edu/internat/>
- Being exposed to international concepts, ideas and experiences is no longer a luxury or supplementary component to education. Being conversant in the issues, cultures and politics of “others” is quickly becoming a mandatory part of being able to compete economically, which inevitably involves being able to understand and communicate with others. Constructive engagement with such concepts can lead to individual and collective transformation, fostering life-long relationships, and even peace, with others who may not initially share the same views and experiences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. YSU administration should undertake a study on the state of international affairs at the university, including:
  - a. The number of, and trends related to, foreign students;
  - b. Particular barriers, issues, concerns related to the integration of foreign students;
  - c. The number of, and trends related to, foreign faculty;
  - d. Funding provided and available for international activities;
  - e. Recruitment practices related to foreign students;
  - f. A survey of international curriculum components and linkages;
  - g. A survey of international job prospects for all YSU students;
  - h. A survey of all international activities.
2. YSU administration should survey all of the foreign students currently at YSU to determine why they chose to come here, and, more importantly, what are their impressions of their experience at YSU. Would they recommend to their colleagues and friends back home to come to YSU?
3. YSU administration should develop a visible, well-resourced International Center to effectively connect all of the diverse aspects related to international affairs.
4. YSU administration should develop a website specifically tailored to the needs of international students, especially in relation to recruitment and retention.
5. YSU administration should establish an annual International Affairs lecture series, inviting, for example, ambassadors from Washington, prominent scholars from other universities, and figures of interest from abroad.
6. YSU administration should develop goals and measures for recruiting and retaining foreign students.
7. YSU administration should develop a public relations angle to effectively define how and why YSU is a place where the world is welcome and, moreover, where the world can exist. We can enrich the “Mahoning Valley” by extending it to include the intricate and numerous socio-cultural, economic and political linkages that are rampantly flooding into the schools and homes of the community.

