Funding North-South Student Mobility

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Barriers to Funding Student Mobility

Cost

International travel has become increasingly affordable for students. North-South mobility programs can be an affordable option for students – some programs calculate the cost of flights, travel, accommodation and food to be the same, if not cheaper, than the costs of studying in Canada for a semester. However, this incentive is insufficient for students who may not be able to afford time away from jobs in Canada that they depend on to pay their tuition and living expenses.

Other finance-related considerations include the costs of program development, with few institutions currently devoting resources for faculty, staff and administrators to conduct exploratory site visits or develop in-person relationships with host country partners.

Financial accessibility limits diverse student participation

A study from the US shows that financial issues have been found to affect participation for groups such as single parents, mature students and first-generation students (IES Abroad 2009). According to recent research published by the NAFSA Association of International Educators (Hulstrand 2016), increasing the number of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds participating is crucial for the achievement of program aspirations. This is because "the oft-stated goals of study abroad and international education—cultural understanding, world peace—will never be achieved without a commitment to diversity" (Hulstrand 2016: 60). One university administrator interviewed for this study indicated that a catalogue of the financial awards currently available for Canadian students by government and non-governmental funding agencies would be valuable to support the participation of underrepresented groups.

This document is part of a series of papers that were researched and written by consultants Dr. Rebecca Tiessen and Dr. Kate Grantham from February to August 2016. It has been edited for clarity. 20 administrators and faculty members at 14 Canadian universities were interviewed for this project. This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.

No seed funding to explore new partnerships

Several interview participants identified lack of seed funds to conduct exploratory site visits and develop new partnerships as a major barrier. Related to this, participants spoke about the fact that many international partnerships simply do not pan out, and highlighted the need for upper administration to account for and accept this possibility when allocating seed funds. This idea was most clearly articulated by a Canadian professor: "[What is needed is] recurrent funding, even just small amounts of seed funding that are just about preliminary investigations of what could be possible, and also a kind of a recognition that sometimes…we are going to lose money on this over the long term. But to recognize…that these kinds of programs are worth investigating and investing in despite the high risk that nothing may come of them."

Other faculty members, particularly those with experience developing and running international field courses, suggested that given the probability of uneven program success, seed funds for exploratory site visits and to assess relationships could be a cost-saving measure in the long run.

No funds to visit existing partners

The individuals we interviewed frequently described these visits by administrators to existing partners as "difficult to justify" to upper administration. Yet participants overwhelmingly agreed that reconnecting in person annually or semi-annually is fundamental for sustainable partnerships. When upper administration is present, these trips can also showcase the value of international learning experiences first-hand, and thereby assist with leveraging funding support.

How Canadian universities are overcoming funding challenges

Student fee levy model

Some universities have opted to finance student mobility by supporting fee levy organizations on campus. One successful example is the *CEED* program at Concordia University, which is dedicated to social justice and community empowerment in Uganda. As a fee-levy association of Concordia, *CEED's* programming is supported by a 35-cent per credit tuition fee for undergraduates. Students who wish to take part in *CEED's* experiential learning program in Uganda get their trip subsidized, paying only $450 for the three-month experience, including accommodation, food, pre-departure training and in-field staff support. Students can opt out of the levy and have that fee refunded.

Using international conferences to meet with current and potential partners

When financial means are limited, conferences organized by international associations offer great opportunities for networking. Discussing her experience, one administrator remarked, “When I go to NAFSA, for example, often I don't even have time to attend any of the panels; all I do is meet with current partners or potential new partners. It’s an important time to meet with current partners whom we don't have the funds to go visit or to meet, or to look for potential new partners as well.”

Conferences organized by NAFSA, the European Association for International Education (EAIE) and the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) were highlighted as being particularly useful.

Endnotes

Hulstrand, J. 2016. “Increasing Diversity in Education Abroad.” Washington: Association of International Educators (NAFSA).

Institute for the International Education of Students Abroad (IES Abroad). 2009. “Report of the IES Abroad think tank on diversity in education abroad.” Chicago: IES Abroad.