

Students' Overseas Exchange Experiences to Be Tapped for Further Internationalization: Initiatives in Peking University

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman. Welcome to this session. I am very honored to share with you some current initiatives in Peking University, which focus on tapping students' overseas exchange experiences for further internationalization.

Thanks for the host. The theme of this conference is timely and meaningful. Higher education internationalization has been surviving as an old topic, or a topic like old-wine-in-new-bottle. With swift change in the field of higher education, especially in China, spurred up by the World-Class University Project, the scale and the depth of internationalization have been raised to a new level.

The data and indicators tell us this exciting story of higher education internationalization. However it is time for us to think what is the real impact and how it has worked. Here I would like to share in the following parts – our recent observations and thoughts on students' exchange experiences in the case of Peking University.

I. Introduction

First, I will introduce the current status of students' overseas exchange in Peking University.

i. Status of students' overseas exchange: data and trends

From the following figures, the overall number of students who have overseas exchange experiences has increased in past five years. The ratio of the exchanged against the total number of students in Peking University has been around 4.5%-4.9% from 2005 to 2009. There is a visible increase last year as 6.7% of students in Peking University have had an overseas exchange experiences

Statistics of students who have overseas exchange experiences (2005—2010)

Years	Total Number
2005-2006	853
2006-2007	1210
2007-2008	1383

2008-2009	1581
2009-2010	1765

Ratio of college students who have overseas exchange experiences (2006—2010)

Academic years	Students sent out	Total number	Ratio
05-06	513	11278	4.5%
06-07	541	11010	4.9%
07-08	541	11165	4.8%
08-09	519	11242	4.6%
09-10	761	11319	6.7%

In the recent university planning, to expand students' overseas exchange experiences is one of the priorities. It is expected to have more PKU students to visit or live for some time in an overseas university.

ii. Institutional supports: regular projects and funding, institutional exchanges, summer/winter schools

On the institutional level, Peking University has established efficient and effective administrative support system to facilitate students' overseas exchanges. We have regular projects and funding to send out students to the universities under international exchange agreements. Students can also apply for governmental exchange projects and attend summer or winter schools in other institutions.

iii. Short-term and Long-term exchange: integrated overseas exchange experiences and academic exchange

The overseas exchange for students can be short or long. I think this is widely shared in every institution. Some of the students just pay a short visit, for example a week or ten days to have a brief exposure. Some stay in other universities for a term and transfer credits back. Some are more academic-oriented.

Whatever purposes they hold, students do have some unusual or new experiences other than their regular life bounded on one campus. Are their experiences valuable only to themselves? Is there any possible connection between their individual experiences and the general institutional internationalization?

II. Initiatives to tap students' exchange experiences for internationalization

i. Routinized summaries vs. purposefully engaged and disseminated exchange experiences

Our past practice with it is to collect personal stories as a written summary and edit them into a book. It is routinized practice but generates no impact. The value of the collection has not surpassed the existence of the books themselves. Recently we are collaborating with some researchers in the field of higher education. For example in last year, a young researcher approached us for access to our students data on their overseas exchange experiences. We worked well with each other. She collected data and used for her scholarly research. But in return she gave feedback and suggested us to engage and disseminate students' exchange experiences in a more intentional way.

ii. Students' initiative to establish students' clubs or societies

At the same time, with the expansion of students' overseas exchange, some active students suggested to establish their clubs or societies to attract students with similar experiences and disseminate theirs to newcomers. This is a bottom-up effort to integrate the piece-by-piece individual exchange experiences into a whole.

III. Meaningful internationalization for students and the university

i. Higher education internationalization without benefiting students is meaningless.

In whatever ways, it is noted that the institutional internationalization is meaningless without students engaged. It would remain a play of words, or a rhetoric empty and lifeless.

Students' experiences are their learning, either on campus or out of campus. It is easy to increase the number of the students to have overseas exchanges, but it should not stay there as an indicator for the degree of internationalization. The beneficiary should be students and go beyond individual tacit and fragmented exotic experiences. The experiences are educational for learning and personal change when they are articulated, communicated and discussed. These should be fountain of wealth intentionally accumulated. Only in this way, higher education internationalization is not a bunch of cold indicators, nor superficial fame for the university. Individual students and the whole campus could benefit from it in an educational way.

ii. Strategic dissemination and utilization of students' overseas exchange experiences through bottom-up students' networking and top-down administrative support.

Therefore we suggest university administrators, colleagues and university faculty members to identify the underestimated value of students' overseas exchange

experiences. Strategic dissemination and utilization through bottom-up students' networking and top-down administrative support can be considered.

iii. Issues of equity and inclusion among students with/without overseas exchange experiences

Last but not least, in our research we have been confirmed that on the current stage, limited by resources, most students who have the opportunities to go overseas for exchanges are both academically and finally capable. It is undeniable that social and economic background matters a lot in the program. What will the gap result between students with or without overseas exchange experiences? We don't know yet. But we would like to bring your attention to this issue of equity and inclusion in tapping their experiences.

IV. Concluding remarks

Finally, from the above sharing of our observation and analysis of Peking University case, we just want to reiterate the following points for a meaningful internationalization for our students.

Revisit the value of the ignored students' exchange experiences

Meaningful internationalization with students' engagement

Ultimate purpose of higher education internationalization