



—a Ferris State international education newsletter

CIP Pillar 1: Why Benchmark?

Greetings from the Office of International Education (OIE). In our last newsletter, we shared the details of our process to develop a Comprehensive Internationalization Plan (CIP). We also shared the five pillars of an effective CIP. Benchmarking academic programs to international standards to achieve excellence in teaching and service is the first pillar, which aligns with our University's core value of *Excellence*.

In today's climate of decreasing student enrollment and increased competition, there are fewer resources available for individual academic programs to pursue quality initiatives that help them excel in their respective fields. Why then should academic programs in small, regional public universities invest resources and energy to benchmark to international standards to achieve excellence?

The answer to this question is at the root of why we have embarked on this CIP process. Benchmarking academic programs globally allows individual programs to connect and collaborate with peers around the world to strengthen academic rigor, renew faculty commitment, and expand opportunities for students globally in today's interconnected world through:

1. **Competitive positioning**
2. Strengthening **innovation**
3. Enhancing **campus climate**

The above are three of the four "2019-20 University Expectations" shared during the SPARC retreat three weeks ago by President Eisler. The triple disruptive challenges the University faces: enrollment, cost of technology, and the rapid pace of changes due to technology will impact us significantly. To survive and thrive, academic programs can competitively position themselves by going global to find ways to adapt through collaboration and innovation. The disruptive challenges the University faces can be countered by understanding and leveraging the larger changes in the global higher education landscape. Benchmarking globally helps us to identify successful approaches by listening and learning from others. It allows us

to expand our markets, strengthen our offerings, innovate out of our problems, and enhance the campus climate.

In this newsletter, we share how benchmarking to international standards can help us achieve these expectations in our current challenging environment. We will also share avenues and mechanisms to help individual academic programs benchmark to international standards not simply to survive, but to thrive. I invite you to engage us in the CIP process and collaborate with us. It will help us to develop the five pillars of Comprehensive Internationalization that synergize our efforts to create a sustainable future for our University and the larger community we serve.

Dr. Piram Prakasam
Executive Director, Office of International Education



Benchmarking Internationally: A Path to Achieve Excellence

The goal of benchmarking is to recognize opportunities to achieve Ferris State University's core focus: *to provide education of the highest quality*. By comparing our processes and performance to best practices, we can identify gaps and surpass current standards to achieve a competitive advantage.

The Higher Education Landscape & Benchmarking:

Institutions and academic programs have access to large amounts of data and networks that can help identify current standards, best practices, and emerging trends. Gathering and analyzing the information allows leaders to make informed decisions and strategically position institutions to meet the demands of tomorrow.

Domestically, we are familiar with emerging trends and the challenges that are on the horizon.

- Declining enrollment is a challenge that most institutions are dealing with, especially small regional, Midwest institutions. Where will our new students come from? How will we help them on their path to and through higher education?
- Rapidly evolving online education and the role that online program management companies (OPMs) will play in this arena create challenges as more students enroll in online courses and programs.
- New technologies, such as AR and VR, leave institutions of higher education either investing heavily to compete for a first-adopter's advantage or scrambling to catch up.

- Pressure to show that students are job-ready in an emerging job market of skill-based hiring is leading to a flood of new credentials and low cost alternatives to higher education that call into question whether the traditional model of a college degree program may become obsolete.
- The imperative to use data analytics to demonstrate responsiveness in all levels of decision-making creates challenges for complex institutions of higher education to collect, analyze, and act on information.
- Rising prices, state disinvestment, and increasing student debt have created the necessity for ambitious capital campaigns as institutions turn to the private sector for support. This dynamic influences the role of campus leadership and creates challenges as private donations may come with strings attached.
- As enrollment trends downward domestically, we also risk perpetuating inequality in access to affordable higher education opportunities.

Enrollment trends and demographic data speak to these challenges but also to the opportunities that are available to agile organizations that are able to adapt. Of course, we must benchmark ourselves against our domestic peers to seek best practices and opportunities to innovate to position ourselves competitively. This seems daunting enough, so why do we need to go beyond to benchmark internationally? What do international trends tell us about the higher education landscape? What we see in the international landscape provides perspective on both our challenges and opportunities.

In the US, in 1999, over 14 million students were enrolled in institutions of higher education, reaching close to 21 million in 2011 and declining to just under 20 million in 2018, where it is projected to remain flat through 2028. Worldwide, however, today there are 200 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education, more than double the 89 million students enrolled in 1998.

North America is only region that has seen fluctuations in higher ed enrollment – the rest of the world is on an upward trend. As economies develop around the world, many countries are investing heavily to increase undergraduate post-secondary capacity to meet the demands of the growing middle class. They are also investing in the development of graduate programs to supply undergraduate institutions with instructors and researchers. Some countries are also investing in graduate research programs for economic development. Although higher ed research for economic development of a country is complicated as the direct and indirect results are at play with public and private R&D, this trend is pressuring change in the global higher education landscape.

As institutions compete globally, institutional rankings are another mechanism for benchmarking. As the growing number of institutions around the world aim for excellence, there is pressure to publish and increase rankings. This is moving the

epicenter of research and scholarship from the West toward the East. Small regional universities need to be aware of rankings and the criteria on which they are based for two main reasons:

1. Although rankings both domestically and internationally, are controversial, they are nonetheless shaping strategic planning, national higher ed reforms, and conditions of employment for faculty.
2. Rankings operate at an institutional level, so small regional institutions will be less competitive. These rankings then can mask individual program quality – which is often where the competitive advantages for institutions like Ferris will be found. Therefore, we need to identify those advantages and strategically leverage them in the domestic and global landscape.

Mechanisms for International Benchmarking

The global ecosystem that we have been cultivating over the past decade offers opportunities for engagement and benchmarking to achieve excellence in the work that we do. Our integrated world allows us to take advantage of the inter-connectivity to compete at a higher plane. Our location and our academic offerings limit our positioning within the system of Michigan public universities. However, the inter-connectivity does allow us to position ourselves competitively around the world.

With limited resources, how then do we benchmark internationally outside of gathering and analyzing data and ranking information?

- Engaging with partner university representatives, faculty and students through exchanges and collaborations such as research, grant writing, and online teaching
- Leveraging high-quality study abroad opportunities that engage international academic and industry partners
- Using the COIN approach (Capacity, Opportunity, Interests, and Needs) to assess international engagement potential to bring maximum return on investment
- Collaborating with the Office of International Education to host an international Lighthouse Symposium to engage international and domestic partners to share best practices

A model for Benchmarking: Lighthouse Symposium

The Lighthouse Symposium model, established by the Office of International Education, has been an effective tool to help academic programs benchmark for excellence. The College of Business adopted this model and has co-hosted an international Lighthouse Symposium for Business Educators in collaboration with our German partner, Rhein-Waal University, and our Dutch partner, Saxion

University for the past three years. The symposium brings together business educators from around the world to benchmark programs, share best practices and models for collaboration, and engage global industry to help programs stay relevant.

The Lighthouse Symposium series has resulted in numerous collaborations that meet the proposed expectations. A few examples are provided below:

1. **Competitive positioning** – Ferris and Rhein-Waal have developed a double degree program in Business Administration and International Business. This is a unique undergraduate double degree program for business in Michigan, which gives us a competitive advantage and helps us seek excellence.
2. Strengthening **Innovation** – Ferris is currently collaborating on a grant application to the DAAD in Germany, which will support faculty travel and collaborations on the Beyond Initiative, the double degree, and the Global Competency Collaborative Certificate Program.
3. Enhancing **Campus Climate** – The Lighthouse Symposium will be held at Ferris in 2020, engaging all COB faculty and numerous international partners. The enthusiasm that is created results in faculty collaborating on and off campus on professional development and student experiential learning opportunities. COB faculty have been spearheading the development of high-quality study abroad programs that engage students, international partner schools, international industry, and local industry to prepare our students for a complex global economy and society.

The well-known quote from Charles Darwin can apply to the challenging and changing environment in higher education, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.”

In the OIE, we often assess our approach to ensure that we are adapting to the changes locally and externally. We often use the terms “synergy” and “ecosystem” to seek ways to *position ourselves competitively*. We find *innovative* ways to engage the campus community and beyond to enhance the *campus climate*. This helps make Ferris a welcoming place for global engagement. Engaging globally and benchmarking to international standards can help us remain agile and seek excellence in the work that we do to serve our students and campus community.

Lisa vonReichbauer
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In Context:

1. **Read:** Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses - 2017 Edition– American Council on Education - <https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Mapping-Internationalization-2017.pdf>



Moment in Time:



We love having our international alumni stop by to visit us. Stephanie (CAS) and Isioma (COET) from Nigeria stopped by the office last week. After graduating from Ferris, Stephanie went on to receive her Master's in Nursing and works as an RN in West Virginia. Isioma completed an internship and will be pursuing her Master's in Architecture in Boston this fall.



Imagine more...



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