

FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION IDENTIFIED BY THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICERS (IRO'S)

Ma. Vivienne Segumpan-Salon, Ehrlich Ray J. Magday, *Jenyliza T. Uchang, 1

Central Mindanao University, Philippines.

*jenyliza_ucang@cmu.edu.ph

ABSTRACT – Several global trends and challenges likely shape the future directions of the international relations office. International relations officers must be more active and strategic in facilitating collaboration and cooperation between nations, organizations, and individuals in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. COVID-19 has underscored the importance of international collaboration and partnership in addressing global health crises. The pandemic, however, did not weaken the international offices; instead, it paved the way for more concrete directions. First, international officers maintain partnerships with different universities and expand activities related to internationalization. Second, the rapid pace of technological change and innovation that transforms how people communicate, work, and interact with one another led to international offices being abreast of these developments and leveraging them to foster greater cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Hence, online student mobility was born to sustain internationalization initiatives, thus opening doors to virtual mobilities, especially for students. Finally, internationalization starts in simple steps through integrating the system and the curriculum to foster international knowledge and skills needed for graduates to be at par with neighboring countries.

Keywords: International Relations Office, Internationalization of SUCs, Future Directions of IRO

1. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of State Colleges and Universities (SUCs) in the Philippines has been gaining ground, especially after CMO 55. S 2016 – Policy Framework and Strategies on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education (PHEIs) was approved. Various SUCs slowly integrated internationalization into their curriculum, activities, and services and established a specific office that spearheads internationalization initiatives.

Among the common activities for internationalization are integrating global perspectives and experiences into their curriculum and activities [2] and [3]. This includes facilitating students, faculty, and staff internationalization and promoting cross-cultural learning and international citizenship education. State colleges and universities can expand their internationalization efforts in several ways.

However, internationalization became challenging when the pandemic broke out. The halt of movement put limits to conventional internationalization undertakings. The report of the International Association of Universities (IAU) [4] in 2020 on the Impact of Covid-19 on internationalization shows that 59% of the institution that responded said that campus activities stopped that 64% of HEIs believed that the pandemic will have effects, 50% answered that it weakened the partnerships, while 31% sees the positive side of the pandemic which will create new opportunities among institutions.

Through the efforts of the international relations officers, universities steered internationalization in an unprecedented manner that also resulted in some changes in the future directions of the office. During the first quarter of 2020, a pandemic was declared by World Health Organization, prompting countries to close their borders to foreigners. Simbulan [5] wrote that the virus causes alteration to human behaviors, relations, and lifestyles and has profound impacts on societies' economic, political, and cultural landscapes across the world. Further, it affected education as countries imposed lockdowns to contain the virus. The internationalization initiatives stopped as everyone scrambled to keep afloat in the extraordinary situation. Institutions designed various strategies to answer the call of times and continue with their

internationalization undertakings. Institutions are trying to hold still and observe where this pandemic would lead.

With the halt brought by the pandemic questions arise as to how the Internationalization Officers navigate their offices to keep abreast of their institutions' internationalization initiatives.

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants of the study were seven International Relations Officers from State Universities and Colleges selected through purposive sampling. Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers requested approval from the Research Office. After this, the researchers sent letters to the participants to request them to be part of the study. When they gave their approval, the researchers scheduled an online interview through Zoom. The data gathered was then transcribed.

Following Creswell's [6] 7 steps of analysis, the researchers started with transcribing the interview followed by winnowing and organizing the data. This was followed by reviewing, reading, and rereading to understand the overall meaning of the transcripts. Important observations were noted to which coding of the data followed. The coding phase followed Tesch's [7] Coding Process. This categorizing produced more precise and general ideas for easy understanding. Moreover, these codes were used to generate a general description of the problem understudied. According to Creswell [6], description involves a detailed presentation of the participants, setting, or events.

The researcher then proceeded to generate themes from the coding process. These themes became the significant finding that this study presented. The participant's perspectives along with their quotations and answers were highlighted and included for further discussion and interpretation.

In all types of data categorizing systems like coding and thematic analysis the NVivo software was used. Verification was done by reviewing the strategic internationalization plan, mission, and vision of the universities and FGD and doing follow-up inquiries to the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The International Relations Offices (IROs) have developed a comprehensive framework and a Strategic Internationalization plan to guide their internationalization efforts. However, in response to the pandemic, the IROs have had to pivot their strategy to meet the present challenges. Looking toward the future, the IRO's directors aim to focus on strengthening partnerships with universities and industries, sustaining mobility programs, and integrating internationalization into the curriculum for the long term. By adapting to the current global situation and prioritizing these key areas, the IROs are well-positioned to continue driving internationalization forward in the years to come.

Theme 1: Continue internationalization activities and partnerships (local and international)

Interviewer: What are the plans of the office now that it's pandemic?

At our university, we have benefitted from this pandemic. It is easier to establish linkages and collaboration with foreign universities. Like, we are members of SEAMEO, we have established connections with some universities before. So during the pandemic, we forged MOA with them. We joined contests. If you can remember, there were contests that asked for videos. Well, our students and faculty participated. It started from there and then we started inviting speakers and then proceeded to mobilities. Our deans have also established partnerships. -IRO 5

MOU with local universities, simple, baby steps like because of the Pandemic. -IRO 2

Almost monthly we conduct an activity. For example, language programs wherein our students enrolled in courses Indonesian language programs, they learn the language and then consortium programs with our network. It was about technology, engineering, and cultural collaboration for 3 months. and then students enrolled in an online course on intercultural awareness and diversity by Erasmus. We don't have internships, so the university did webinars to enhance their skills.-IRO 4

- R

Nong ako na talga [when I was designated] we participated more with having students programs with another university it's not just students participating lang but we the university was able to be an organizer. -IRO 7

Support for Theme 1

Over the past 30 to 40 years, internationalization in higher education has gone from being a minor to a major component of the reform agenda. According to de Wit ,H and Deca [8] internationalization has also progressed and has evolved in different directions. Further, Jibeen , T & Khan, M.A [9] discussed that collaborating with international institutions improved academic standards, globally aware students and staff, and national and international citizenship for faculty and staff from developing nations are some benefits of internationalization

Additionally, creating partnerships with an individual impact, institutional impact, national impact, and global impact is necessary to achieve broad success in international partnerships, noting that each cooperation has unique qualities that make it perfect for one or more of the parties involved [9] . By engaging in internationalization, universities can better

comprehend the challenges and opportunities presented by globalization and foster international collaboration and understanding between people of different cultures. State colleges and universities can also establish partnerships with institutions from other countries to collaborate on research, exchange programs, and joint academic initiatives, providing opportunities for cross-cultural learning and international experience for students, faculty, and staff.

Theme 2: Shift to Virtual Mobility

The office, with all fairness, the office is active. We have lots of virtual mobility programs and activities – IRO 4

In 2020 , we have home-based IZN both for faculty and students. We have virtual mobility for our students and we also have virtual faculty exchange. We did credit transfer, students are enrolled from Indonesia (they were our partners in ASEAN) , our students are also enrolled in our respective partners. Its complementation so no problem with tuition. There are classes assigned to our foreign students and vice versa. Across all programs, EDUC, IT, Tourism Mngt, and Business Management. Like before we have SEAMEO and SEA-TVT. IZN is integrated into the curriculum. Plus we have plenty of students in graduate students from CHINA and Vietnam. They have English Proficiency Course. IRO 5

Attendance to IZN conferences and webinars and virtual internship. The host institution is from Japan. We have partners and an association of Japanese companies, we have a MOA .. one agreement includes faculty training and student internship.

IRO 1

Support for Theme 2

Most IROs' strategies now focus on engaging virtual mobility, which can only be done by finding partners and industries willing to cater to or accept their students, faculty members, or staff. Hence, the need to strengthen the ties and linkages means that the collaboration should stay even post Covid-19 and that countries will open their borders again to international students. Although in the research conducted by IAU [2] in 2020 on the Impact of Covid -19 on internationalization, 64% of HEIs reported that COVID-19 would have various effects on the area of partnerships. However, for 31% of respondents, the COVID-19 Pandemic created new opportunities with partner institutions. Virtual forms of internationalization have become more significant in on-campus and distant learning alike during this period, with the study fields of digitalization and distance learning contributing[8].

Theme 3: Improving Curriculum

Students must be at par with graduates of other countries, you know the competition. There should be complementation of the curriculum so our students are at par with our graduates. IRO 7

In internationalization, it is not necessary you go out of the country. There is what we call home-based internationalization. We can make it sustainable if we start integrating in the curriculum. Culture can be embedded in the curriculum -IRO 5

Support for Theme 3

Higher education leaders are working to develop curricula that reflect the global perspectives that students will encounter as a result of the growing emphasis on the value of higher education as an export market and a source of revenue, as well as the

resulting increases in international student enrollment at colleges and universities.

Students must be able to work and thrive in increasingly complicated and diverse work situations [3]. Further, improving the curriculum recognizes the importance of intercultural and international skills and knowledge, as well as cultural awareness and the ability to think in a local, national, and global context.

The internationalization of state colleges and universities has become an increasingly important area of focus for higher education institutions. This process involves integrating global perspectives and experiences into the curriculum and activities of these institutions, as well as facilitating the internationalization of students, faculty, and staff. State colleges and universities can promote global citizenship education by integrating it into their curriculum. This can be achieved by offering courses that address topics such as sustainability, human rights, and intercultural communication, enabling students to develop a sense of responsibility towards global issues and understand their role in the world.

Overall, the internationalization of state colleges and universities is an ongoing process that requires collaboration and innovation. By focusing on these areas of development, state colleges and universities can better prepare their students for the globalized world and contribute to the advancement of global knowledge and understanding.

Identifying the future direction of an International Relations Officer (IRO) is crucial in today's globalized world, where international relations play an essential role in political, economic, and social issues. An IRO's job is to promote and enhance international cooperation and communication between organizations, governments, and other stakeholders. Identifying the future direction of an IRO is important for the reasons of globalization, changing political and economic landscapes, and ensuring ineffective communication and cooperation. Identifying the future direction of the IROs can help organizations stay on top of the latest trends and best practices in international relations, which is essential for success in today's globalized economy. Also, since the political and economic landscapes are constantly evolving, this can have a significant impact on international relations. Identifying the future direction of the IRO can help organizations anticipate and respond to these changes, and ensure that their international relations strategies remain relevant and effective. Lastly, identifying the future direction of the IROs can help organizations develop and implement strategies that promote open dialogue and collaboration between different stakeholders, which is critical for success in international business and diplomacy.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the future direction of IROs in the internationalization of SUCs (State Universities and Colleges) will require a strong emphasis on building and maintaining partnerships with other universities and industries, sustaining mobility programs, and embedding internationalization into the curriculum for the long-term. While the pandemic has presented significant challenges, IROs have demonstrated their ability to adapt and pivot their strategies to meet these

challenges. By prioritizing these key areas, IROs can continue to drive internationalization forward and foster a more globally-engaged academic community within SUCs. Ultimately, this will help to cultivate a new generation of graduates who are equipped with the skills, knowledge, and global perspective necessary to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world.

Based on the current context and future trends, here are some recommendations for the future direction of IROs in the internationalization of SUCs:

Strengthen and Expand International Partnerships: IROs should focus on building strong and diverse partnerships with universities and industries from different regions of the world. This will help to create opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in international activities, exchange programs, joint research projects, and other collaborative initiatives.

Prioritize Digital and Virtual Mobility Programs: Given the current limitations on physical mobility, IROs should focus on developing digital and virtual mobility programs that allow students and faculty to engage in international activities remotely. This can include virtual exchange programs, online courses, and other digital learning opportunities.

Embed Internationalization into the Curriculum: IROs should work closely with academic departments to embed internationalization into the curriculum. This can include developing internationalized course content, promoting intercultural competency, and encouraging international research collaborations.

Foster a Global Campus Culture: IROs should work to create a welcoming and inclusive campus environment that values diversity and promotes global engagement. This can include organizing international events and activities, providing resources for international students, and promoting cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

Conduct Regular Evaluation and Assessment: IROs should regularly evaluate and assess their internationalization efforts to measure their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This can include tracking student and faculty participation in international activities, assessing the impact of international programs on learning outcomes, and conducting surveys to gather feedback from stakeholders.

By implementing these recommendations, IROs can continue to drive the internationalization of SUCs forward and foster a more globally-engaged academic community.

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