

Session 8: Workshop 2

Title: Developing Links with South America

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Chair: Dr Frederick Lowy, Vice-Chancellor, Concordia University, Canada

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Chair's Introduction.

Dr Jorge Taboada was educated in the USA and Argentina. He is heavily involved in educational activities in the South American region; he is Vice-Chancellor of UNSAT, and has been editor and director of Campus Magazine since 1995. He is an advisor in the Argentine-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Southeast Asia Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Commission of Foreign Trade. He is also a columnist for the newspaper *La Frenza*.

Dr Taboada's Presentation

Background

The Latin American and South American regions are very distinct, and this presentation concentrates on the South American region known as the “ABC” area (Argentina, Brazil and Chile). Argentina has 91 universities, of which about 40% are privately owned. People pay between \$15,000-\$25,000 for graduate programmes. Brazil, the second largest country of the three, is the world’s 8th largest economy. Chile is a smaller country, bordering Argentina, and it has about 44 universities. Each of the countries has a distinct higher education strategy.

Argentina has about one million university students. As with many other countries, such as India, the “brain drain” can be a problem, and Argentina has approximately two million professionals working outside the country, mainly in the USA. Countries in the Americas are working on ways to decrease the effects of this migration to the USA. Funding has been increased in the Mexican university system to encourage people to study, work and stay in the country. The “ABC” South American population totals approximately 210m, and each of these countries is similarly investing money in higher education programmes. Argentina is a good country for universities to collaborate with, as it has the highest per capita income in South America, and people can afford to invest in their education.

Potential for Collaboration

Language barriers are not a problem in Argentina, as most people speak English or are bilingual. As a country Argentina has historically enjoyed a close relationship with Europe, and it is a very outward-looking country. English language skills are especially important to those working in hotels/multi-national institutions.

One area institutions can focus on is executive training courses, and some Canadian colleges are already exploiting these courses in the South American region. At first they focused on undergraduate courses, but these were not so successful. The family culture in Argentina does not encourage people under the age of twenty-one to leave home and live abroad.

Universities should consider making an agreement with a specific institution. Although translating programmes especially for the South American market can be expensive, the practicalities are fairly straightforward. There is considerable potential for capitalising on the need for language skills. ESL is an important part of the Argentinian education market. There has been an aggressive campaign by US universities, and those from the UK, Australia and New Zealand also have a strong presence in this area

The Internet will become increasingly important as an educational tool. UNSAT has 40 classrooms, offering education through satellite connections. UNSAT can offer distance training to companies through audio, video and Internet corporate training. In 2000 there were close to 2m Internet users in South America, and projections forecast that this will rise to 5m by 2005.

There are many ways to co-operate with the South American market. The University of Baltimore, Maryland has a scheme where MBA students can finish their studies in Argentina or Brazil, producing market research/field study for a company. Such collaborative programmes are set to rise, and are worthwhile exploring at an institutional level.

Argentina can work with both “developed” and “less-developed” countries. Globalisation is becoming important in both work and education. People must be proactive if they wish to enjoy the benefits of this new global culture, and realise that countries will become increasingly inter-dependent on each other.

Questions and Answers

Given the large numbers of very able English teachers in, for instance, New Delhi, how willing would students from Argentina and other parts of South America be to travel to a country such as India for part of their education?

South Americans like to travel and recognise that universities exist not only to increase knowledge but also to promote exchange. If you find the right programme, mobility is no

problem. People appreciate, moreover, that India has particular strengths in its ability to produce highly skilled IT workers. Similarly, Argentina has realised the importance of computing, and has the highest proportion of Internet developments in the South American region.

Canadian institutions have large numbers of South Americans on ESL programmes - would students welcome a year or so abroad to develop their language skills further?

Short-term ESL courses are better. People prefer two to four week courses - maybe up to a semester at the longest. Many office workers need to develop their language skills to safeguard their career development. One or two month courses in the holiday season are also popular. An institution should begin by offering one or two programs, monitor the success rate, and then expand their available programmes.

In terms of the size scope of programmes on offer, the largest is not always the best. As with companies operating on the Internet, quality is more important than quantity. And although language teaching is not always wholly suitable for delivery through the Internet, it is good as a tool for basic programmes and arranging the exchange of students.

What are the costs of a university education in Argentina?

In the private sector in Argentina, university education costs are US\$250-\$600 per month. The overall costs of a Master's programme would be approximately between US\$10,000-\$25,000 over one or two years.

So far you have not mentioned any involvement with African universities - is it possible to develop collaborative programmes with Africa?

There is the possibility for links and ways to co-operate - there was a decline with difficult political/government relations in the 1980s, but there is a possibility for change now, and there is no reason why Argentina cannot co-operate with the African region (see below).

What is an example of an international collaboration UNSTAT has been involved with?

UNSTAT is to co-operate with the University of Stellenbosch to set up a wine-producing programme. Argentina has a strong agricultural sector, with an important meat industry, and such schemes build on this traditional area of the economy

At UNSAT we can help facilitate co-operation between international universities and those in Argentina by providing advice and helping overseas institutions find "ways in" to the market.

[Following the end of the formal discussion period several Indian and Canadian Vice-Chancellors approached Dr Taboada with a view to setting up student exchanges between their institutions, for example operating a direct exchange of students between Argentina and their institution to improve English/Spanish language skills, at a minimal cost to both parties.]