Technology, Collaborations, and IFLE: Strategies and Structures

Summary Report and Recommendations

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Anchor paper: Nancy Ruther, Associate Director, Macmillan Center for International and Area Studies, Yale University.
Presenters: Suzanne Young (Yale Center for Language Study); Linda Jorn (University of Wisconsin); Julie Sykes (University of Oregon)
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Background assumptions

Every session at the conference underscored, in some way, rapidly growing needs for "globally capable" citizens in the corporate, government, and non-profit sectors. The scale of need has increased enormously. At the same time, the *profile* of need has changed. If you ask, "Who needs what skills, and when in their careers, and how much of those skills do they need?", the answer is very different from what it would have been even ten years ago. Technology, and in particular technologies that support novel means of individual and institutional collaboration, are both an answer to these evolving needs and a challenge in their own right.

As many speakers at the conference remarked, technology has empowered individuals to seek their own solutions and their own education, sometimes outside the boundaries of existing institutions and programs. Many if not most working professionals and businesspeople in all sizes and types of organizations now experience a greatly-expanded roster of opportunities for interaction with other languages and cultures. The ways in which they encounter them go well outside formal programs and institutions, and are not easily associated with any particular degree, educational structure or pedagogy. That creates a type of demand for education that is both unfamiliar and hard to marshal into something that institutions can address. But it has also raised the apparent relevance of IFLE subjects not only for students, but for funders, employers and others; caused students to become more motivated on their own; and expanded the techniques and modalities available for teaching. Most important, technology has the power to bend both cost and access curves to allow the IFLE and other teaching resources to reach and attract many more students at far lower cost.

Recommendations

The speakers in our session each had different perspectives on the problem. One of the key policy points across all was the need to scaffold IFLE resources to flexibly enable a range of learners to develop basic through advanced skill and knowledge. Nancy Ruther's anchor paper explicitly addressed many of the institutional aspects discussed in this report. Suzanne Young's innovative programs for individual and small-group language learning address questions of increased, and increasingly distributed, individual demand for language skills. Julie Sykes

showed us low cost, innovative and high impact teaching methods that go well beyond the walls of the classroom. Linda Jorn provided a central, institutional perspective on the large-scale provisioning of such technology-dependent approaches. Each of these papers presented a different piece of the elephant; the recommendations that follow attempt to deal with the elephant as a whole.

Lower the threshold for innovation

There is a need to lower the threshold for innovation so a range of higher education institutions and associations can experiment and develop these new IFLE approaches to reach more learners, more robustly. A variety of approaches can and should be taken, including:

- providing seed grants for innovation,
- finding talent that can staff and support technology based efforts,
- promoting interdisciplinary partnerships between technologists, IFLE domain experts, and language teachers.

For example, one might imagine a course supported by a pair of TAs, one a subject-matter expert at the MA or PhD level, and the other a graduate student in instructional design. Both learn the subject matter, develop and deploy the technology-based teaching tools, and provide support for a faculty member who brings both pedagogy and subject-matter expertise to the table. This "pays each participant in their own currency," a key premise of sustainable innovation. The faculty want to support their grad students and teach more students as well as possible in their field of expertise. The Grad students want to be able to use the new technology in their teaching and show this expertise in the competitive job market. The instructional designer grad student expands their support expertise to new fields with challenges such as foreign language scripts.

Support projects, not centers

There is a need to support innovative activities at smaller scale. Projects are both more focused on innovation, more flexible, and easier for a hosting institution to accommodate insofar as their overhead is more flexible. While a project model might require higher levels of administrative coordination and support in the short term, it is likely that the need for such overhead is not as sustained. Most of all, project-scale activity is much easier to arrange around particular issues or regional interests, and to fit with the substantive interests of faculty. Finally, projects of different scale align naturally with administrative entities of similarly different scale. A given institution might align projects with a series of NRC-like centers; area-focused projects could be set up by disciplinary or field-based academic associations such as the African or Mid-East Studies Association or the Political Science Association; others might run under the auspices of business schools or interested university departments.

There are many ways to do this; all of them involve more nimble, focused alignment of resources and interests with perceived needs. In some ways, Language Resource Centers and

Centers for International Business Education already provide examples. The key attributes are flexibility and focus.

Promote the apparatus of resource sharing

There is a wide array of unglamorous activity that would create a much more fluid and supportive environment for change and innovation. The creation of common, nuts-and-bolts data standards around the apparatus of administration and evaluation would enable individual projects and institutions to learn from each others' experience. There is a vast amount of data already present in course-management and administrative systems that can be leveraged into understanding of what works and what does not. And innovative solutions are needed to a series of very low-level "speed bumps" that hinder collaboration even within institutions, never mind across the breadth of global higher education. Teachers who work with telepresence-type classes across multiple institutions, for example, often find that individual academic calendars intersect in a way that makes Spring Break eight weeks long. That problem, and others like it, might be solved by combining synchronous and asynchronous elements in a course structure that could diverge and reconverge around calendar discontinuities. And there is a host of work to be done around discovering and creating optimal financial and governance structures for consortia.

Create a national architecture of consortia and collaboration

There is a need to think in terms of networks of projects and activities spread across higher education. Such a network would

- *Be a home for innovative projects and "startup" activities*
- *Promote program sustainability*, most particularly by making it a factor in program evaluation. That would involve taking a hard look at
    - the level of data and resource sharing
    - scalability of approaches
    - alignment of the program with institutions and with needs
    - benchmarking across projects and types of institutions to promote learning from various experiences
- *Enable sharing of "learning objects" across institutions.* Such objects include, among other things, e.g. create shared foundational courses using top experts across many campuses that faculty can use as a "resource spine' for their own courses and departments can use for curricular development
    - Courseware modules
    - Applications.
    - Documentation and other teaching and learning resources such as multimedia resources, syllabi, and so on.
- *Aggregate supply and demand across institutions*. Some schools and programs have a subcritical mass of students for classes in a given language or topic; others have

experts but not enough students to justify a class. Technology can be used to make markets in which these parties can find one another.

- *Match talent with employers.* For graduates with IFL skills and employers who seek to hire people for IFL-focused roles, the technology provides strong matching capacity, e.g. e-portfolio systems on a national or regional or subject matter bases.
- *Promote administrative innovation*. Interestingly, many in our session chose to hear this as "promoting administrative expansion", but that is not what is meant. Rather, what's needed are better ways of bringing about negotiation and ultimately alignment between institutions. That is partly a matter of finding better, less burdensome mechanisms for sharing resources and governance. But it is also a matter of finding the means by which all parties in the educational process can be rewarded in ways that fit their career needs, in currency that will be honored in their home institutions.

The project approach with network-building focus can foment necessary innovation for IFLE. It can allow partnerships and affiliations to grow over time, testing small scale and, depending on results, sunsetting or building out with additional partners or ranging into new subjects. The SUNY-COIL two country course model and the NCTA outreach model were both cited as examples of how this network model can build over time.

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