

# The International Exchange Process

A Guidebook on Trans-National  
Learning for Community & Technical  
Colleges



**A Product of the Trans-Atlantic  
Technology and Training Alliance**

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## Introduction

*To continue to compete successfully in the global economy and to maintain our role as a world leader, the United States needs to ensure that its citizens develop a broad understanding of the world, proficiency in other languages, and knowledge of other cultures. America's leadership also depends on building ties with those who will guide the political, cultural, and economic development of their countries in the future. A coherent and coordinated international educational strategy will help us meet the twin challenges of preparing our citizens for a global environment while continuing to attract and educate future leaders from abroad.*

Memorandum for the Heads of  
Executive Departments and Agencies,  
The White House  
April 19, 2000

It is now self-evident that future U.S. educational strategies will have to include greater global perspectives. This is necessary not only because of the increasing intermingling of people from different cultures but because of the increasing merging of national economies. The U.S. economy, like those of virtually all other countries, is heavily dependent on global markets, as well as on foreign contributions of science, innovation, and technical skill. This linkage will deepen even further as technology continues to “reduce the space” between nations and to eliminate the barriers to cooperation, and as working partnerships form. Global networks and partnerships will become the norm rather than an exception to the traditional “United States-only” economic development strategy.

To prepare young people and re-educate incumbent workers to work in this global environment, educational institutions must take the lead in exposing citizens to foreign cultures, history, current events, and business climates. Personal contact is one of the most effective learning tools. Policies should therefore be developed to encourage students at all levels to take advantage of learning opportunities overseas, and to bring foreign students and others to the campus to interact with students in classes and other settings in the community.

Education policies should also extend the scope of knowledge and education to include historical and current information about other countries and their business practices, and encourage the acquisition or enhancement of foreign language skills. It is not enough to simply permit such activity. Policies need to actively encourage schools at all levels to establish programs that facilitate global learning and relationships, including study tours and exchange programs for students, faculty, and administrators.

Most community colleges have few international connections and minimal experience with exchange programs. What experiences they do have are mainly as hosts for non-U.S. students, not in using exchanges as learning opportunities. This handbook offers a set of guidelines for community colleges to consider when designing and implementing cost-effective and practical international exchange programs. Such exchanges provide opportunities for community college students and staff, who in the past have had little direct exposure to other cultures and economies, to learn and develop global partnerships.

## Why do an exchange?

Reasons to consider an exchange program:

**expose participants** to new and different perspectives, experiences, and expertise based in other cultural, social, and economic environments.

**spur innovation** and “outside of the box” thinking by exposing participants to new approaches to similar goals and different solutions to common problems.

**increase career development** and the expertise and employability of members involved in the exchange.

**build interest** in the college by using the exchange to draw applicants to programs.

**enhance professional development** by allowing participants to hone their skills under new, different, and often more challenging conditions.

**promote economic and professional networks** essential for long-term success in increasingly global markets.

## Exchange possibilities

The three principle parties within the college environment who can benefit from an exchange are **faculty, administrators, and**

**students**. If it is not feasible to begin an exchange program for all three groups, a necessary first step is to determine who will participate in the initial exchange.

### Decide who goes:

- Faculty, administrators, or students?
- Where is the greatest return on the investment?

**Faculty** may be the preferred choice to start because as part of the exchange they can assess the value and potential problems and thus help set

the stage for student exchanges. This is also an economical option. Three weeks of faculty exchange in each direction yields six weeks total of professional development. College faculty members are

immersed within another culture and learn from colleagues. The exchange members come to the home college and, while learning from the host, provide professional development to the host

college. Because faculty members are already, in practice, colleagues through their participation in the same field, an implied language or code of conduct and expectations accompanies the exchange participants and facilitates the learning and development process. In addition, the more experienced the faculty members are the more value is added to the exchange process.

**Benchmark:** Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) in North Carolina and Erhvervs Uddannelses Center-Sønderborg (EUC-Syd) in Southern Denmark, decided to send faculty first. The faculty members already had experience with traveling and learning outside of their home countries. In addition, sending faculty members allowed for maximal return on the investment. Three weeks abroad per faculty member equals six weeks total professional development for both schools.

**Administrators** are a second group that can benefit significantly from exchange by expanding their knowledge of organizational structures and management techniques. There inevitably are similarities

and differences in different countries' systems of education. As the lead exchange administrator of Guilford Technical Community College commented, we find that "there are things that we do well and things that we do not do so well." Exchange programs offer a rich opportunity to learn from new experiences, which can lead to innovative changes in the home colleges or institutions. Since administrators are responsible for many aspects of the educational process and outcomes, participating in an exchange broadens their capacity to adapt to their home community's needs, resources, and development. In this way, the college, through its organizational structure and responsiveness to the community, best serves the community.

**For students**, challenging international exchanges offer cultural and workplace

experience that expands their personal and professional horizons and adds to their value in the labor market. Such experiences better prepare students to work in a global economy and leave the students with greater capacity for tolerance and flexibility. If the exchange includes a workplace experience, what students learn and the contacts they make can be an advantage in future employment.

These experiences heighten the student's adaptability, and eventually success, in changing work and cultural conditions. Exchange programs also challenge students

### Administrators benefit from:

- Expanded knowledge of other organizational structures and management techniques.
- Ideas for new and innovative changes at the home school.
- Expanded resources for adaptation to community needs, resources, and development.

**Benchmark:** Finland's Pohois-Savo Polytechnic and Alabama's Beville Center arranged for a Finnish engineering faculty member to spend a year in the U.S. He worked in industry and at the Center teaching classes for Gadsden State community college.

### Students benefit from:

- Immersion in and appreciation of other cultures.
- Preparation for work in a global economy.
- Broadened personal and professional horizons.
- Increased sensitivity to international differences.
- Lifelong effect on personal and professional attitudes.
- Exposure to different organizational and management systems.

to question inherent cultural norms and practices. Partly because of the generally inadequate foreign language skills of American youth, exchange programs for students require a considerable amount of care and forethought. Younger students in particular are more likely to lack the maturity necessary to enter and appreciate another culture. The exchange program thus must be constructed to nurture and support students through the difficulties of

### Personal contacts allow:

- Quick and inexpensive exchange programs.

### Good contacts develop from:

- Networking.
- Professional memberships or business associations.
- Contacts from outside one's field.

**Benchmark:** Several exchanges have taken place under the auspices of the TransAtlantic Technology and Training Alliance (TA3), a network of companies in the United States, Europe, and South Africa. Membership facilitated familiarity and personal relationships, as well as opportunities for site visits. Not having to "hunt" for exchange partners was seen as a significant facilitator to the speed and success with which the programs have been implemented.

learning and appreciating cultural norms that can be vastly different from those with which students are familiar. For these very reasons, students often benefit the most from exchange programs. They particularly benefit students from low-income families who have had little if any opportunity to travel abroad and experience other cultures. These exchanges can create indelible impressions upon students that will last a lifetime and affect their work and personal lives.

most easily accessible is the business or professional association. These contacts, with a little effort and support, can eventually develop into innovative and exciting exchange programs.

### Working out logistical details

Once contact is established and a working partnership formed, the logistical details of the exchange must be resolved. First, the

colleges must identify the programs to include in the exchange. In the first year of the exchange program, it is advisable to begin with one program. More programs, and more exchange partners, can be added after the exchange process has been perfected for a given site. Choice of program is entirely the decision of the exchange partners, but should be an area or program in which partners have a mutual interest and opportunity to benefit. The purpose of an exchange is not to provide a learning opportunity for one site; it is to expand knowledge and skills in both places. Therefore, the short list of programs should include those programs in which both colleges recognize strengths and weaknesses and see the potential to benefit from the other college's techniques and knowledge. This requires communication and knowledge of each other's programs. An administrative visit to the exchange partner can facilitate the process, allowing a first-hand review of the exchange partner's facilities as well as potential language barriers, lodging accommodations, transportation needs, etc. Visiting a site allows the exchange administrator to more fully realize the planning detail necessary. Sufficient time should be given for the planning process, to allow for visits to exchange colleges

### Personal contacts

Probably the most important factor in facilitating the exchange process is networking to establish personal contacts. Personal contacts allow the exchange to develop quickly and occur economically. Networking takes place in various venues, but one of the

**Step 1:** Identify which programs to include in the exchange.

- Start with one program.
- Choose an area where both partners can benefit.

**Step 2:** Conduct advance administrative visits.

- Review facilities.
- Review room and board accommodations.
- Evaluate timeline necessary to implement the exchange.
- Determine details that need attention.

**Benchmark:** While visits had been conducted prior to and following the exchange, exchange administrators at GTCC and EUC-Syd resolved all logistical details almost entirely via e-mail communication.

**Benchmark:** The exchange administrator at Hudson Valley Community College-New York organized a study tour for local automobile business and industry representatives. These representatives toured the Kuniberg Berufskolleg in Recklighausen, Germany, and met with the Automotive Guild, the Chamber of Commerce, and the German Automobile Traders Association. The representatives also toured the training facilities, car dealerships and the Ford Training Center-Cologne. The study tour helped generate interest and motivate local industry into supporting German exchange students by providing the apprenticeships necessary to complete the exchange.

and to fully resolve even minute aspects of the exchange process. Little details, such as escorting to and from airports, money exchange, and translation accommodations, have a large impact on the exchange experience. Exchange participants must feel comfortable enough in the host culture to focus their attention on the program.

Logistical details are numerous; however,

### Step 3: Exchange checklist

- Travel details.
- Lodging.
- Duration.
- Expenses.
- Funding.
- Objectives and Goals.
- Select participants.
- Insurance and Liability.

several are critical and must be resolved before any travel is allowed to take place.

#### 1) Travel details.

Complete travel accommodations must be booked prior to departure. An itinerary of travel should be kept on

file at both the home and host college, as well as given to participants. For overseas travel, it is also a good idea for the home

**Benchmark:** EUC-Syd maintains lodging for its continuing education programs and was able to use this lodging and waive lodging fees for the exchange. GTCC faculty members provided lodging and a car was signed out of the college's car pool for the visiting faculty.

and host colleges to keep copies of important documentation, such as passports, visas, or immunization records. It is much easier to replace lost or stolen records with a copy (preferably notarized) of the original. Itineraries should be as detailed as possible and give emergency contact information.

**Visas:** Should Visas be necessary, they can be obtained from the embassy or consulate of the country you wish to visit. The U.S. State Department publishes, "Foreign Entry Requirements," that details the application process for countries with which the U.S. has reciprocal agreements. U.S. colleges may apply to arrange "J" visas for exchange participants from other countries through the U.S. Information Agency (<http://exchange.state.gov/visa>).

**2) Lodging.** Like travel details, lodging arrangements should be resolved well in advance. Lodging can be accommodated in a variety of ways. Colleges sometimes have access to "partial stay" accommodations in local hotels or hostels (these often include kitchen facilities). Other faculty members or exchange participants can offer home accommodations. Finally, dormitories at the college can be made available. Choice of lodg-

ing should represent the best mix of what is affordable with what is most convenient for the exchange participants, now living and working in a foreign environment. It is not always feasible to have ideal accommodations; this too is part of the exchange experience.

**3) Duration.** Exchange programs vary in duration. Some are very brief, lasting only two or three weeks. Others require an entire semester abroad. As duration increases, so do the costs and, importantly, the benefits. Having a full semester abroad allows participants to become more fully immersed in another culture, and learn more of the language and workplace culture. Longer exchanges also facilitate the forming of networks among participants.

**4) Expenses.** Each college should determine, with its participants, how to accommodate expenses. For administrators and faculty, it is suggested that colleges provide a travel cost budget prior to departure. This budget should detail per diem amounts for each day of the exchange (a conversion from dollars to foreign currency is helpful), as well as the amount the college is willing to reimburse participants for expenses during the trip. It is up to the individual college to decide upon the amount of and method for reimbursement for travel expenses. It is not unusual for participants to have to cover some expenses. For students, colleges often cannot provide per diem or travel expenses, but may help to raise support based on need. Furthermore, they will arrange accommodations and provide students

**Benchmark:** GTCC was able to reduce the cost of the exchange to little more than travel costs. Lodging was provided by both colleges, as was a large amount of the food (by nature of the program being culinary). Travel costs included airfare and costs for travel within the host country.

**Benchmark:** Hudson Valley Community College-New York and Kuniberg Berufskolleg-Germany received funding from the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft (CDG) in Germany. The CDG is a partner to the Carl Duisberg Society International (CDS). Together, these organizations sponsor study tours for high school and community college administrators and promote international partnerships between schools.

with best cost estimates prior to departure. For all participants, a provision or procedure for emergency funds is advised.

**5) Resources.** Funding is probably the largest barrier to getting the program off the ground. The lower the cost of the overall program, the easier it will be to procure the necessary funds. Providing room and board and on site travel (i.e., through quid pro quo arrangements, established procedures for transportation, etc.) will reduce the cost of the exchange to little more than travel costs. If funding is scarce, more effort into room and board options might be necessary. Again, this requires consistent communication with the exchange partner. Both parties in the exchange should receive equal value on their exchange—this extends, as much as

**Benchmark:** GTCC and EUC-Syd faculty members established the goals and objectives for the exchange.

**Benchmark:** GTCC chose its program chair as a participant. The program chair is most able to implement practical knowledge gained through the exchange program.

### **A special note on building industry support...**

Because the exchange is designed to help students enter the workforce with highly developed skills and networks, it is very helpful to get the support and input of local industrial leaders.

Their support and feedback can help colleges tailor their programs to evolving local needs. This is also a potential source of financial support for the program.

possible, to the level of accommodations as well as professional learning opportunities.

Finding funding sources is one of the more difficult tasks facing the exchange administrator. Local (i.e., on-site) funds are the first place to look. These might include corporate sponsors, local chambers of commerce, and local and regional foundations. Administrators should expand funding options as necessary to be confident of the program's sustainability. Initiation of the program requires considerable time and effort; the best return on this investment is a program that has long-term sustainability. Funding sources and options should therefore be considered at the beginning of discussions and kept in mind throughout the design of the program.

**6) Setting objectives or goals.** The exchange is a professional learning experience. It is helpful to enter the exchange with goals and objectives in mind and to evaluate the exchange experience based on these goals and objectives. Participants should enter the exchange with some knowledge of the country or site they are to visit and use this knowledge to help develop goals that would be personally meaningful as well as meaningful for the home college. The exchange program is an investment, and must be treated as one. If the program is not meeting goals, it should be re-evaluated and changed to provide the best possible return on the investment of time and money.

**7) Selecting exchange participants.** Exchanges are enjoyable and rewarding experiences and are likely to have many applicants for each exchange position. Choosing exchange participants is at the discretion of the college. It is recommended that the college choose participants who are best qualified to apply what is learned and to provide equal value to the exchange partner. The exchange, after all, will only work if both partners feel they are receiving value for their investment. The partners must therefore decide together the qualifications for exchange participants and have knowledge of the participants before arrival.

**8) Insurance and liability.** Colleges vary in their insurance policies. Policies must be understood and verified before departure. It is essential that participants be

**Benchmark:** Health insurance for GTCC and EUC-Syd faculty was maintained by the home institution. Additionally, paperwork was reduced as there was no intention of either participant drawing a salary from the exchange partner, or expecting to stay in the host country for an extended period.

### **Insuring students:**

Unlike faculty and administrators, colleges do not necessarily insure students taking part in an exchange. To minimize liability risks, have your school attorney prepare a package that includes basic liability disclaimers and any authorizations needed for minors. Medical attention, for instance, requires parental permission if the student is a minor.

In addition, students should have a general medical physical prior to leaving for the exchange. It is also prudent for the student to purchase medical insurance that covers the costs of evacuation or movement. Such insurance options are temporary and are available from most insurance providers.

**Benchmark:** Before sending students on exchange with Kuniberg Berufskolleg-Germany, Hudson Valley Community College-New York had the school attorney put together a liability package that included a general disclaimer, authorization for emergency medical treatment, and a medical evaluation form signed by a doctor. Students were required to purchase medical evacuation and repatriation insurance.

### A special note about language...

Language can be one of the most significant barriers to the success of the program. It is not realistic to expect all countries and programs to use English for teaching and communication. An important aspect of planning is the accommodation of any language barriers that might exist, for either exchange partner. Options include using translators during official or working sessions, or including at least one participant with a working knowledge of the other language. As the program becomes more of a mainstay at the college, prerequisite short courses in the host college's language can be offered to all interested participants or included in the program's curriculum. For participants who are serious about partaking in the exchange, even a minimal knowledge of the host's language will be an exciting component and benefit of the process.

insured while in the exchange country. Ideally, the home college's insurance will continue to cover participants, especially faculty or administrators. Insurance might be a little trickier for students entering the exchange. The insurance representative for the university needs to be kept informed of the exchange process, and his or her input solicited. Participant must also be informed prior to departure of the extent and conditions of coverage, and given the appropriate information to carry along during the exchange.

### A crash course in acculturation

For many, the exchange will place participants in an unknown culture, not to mention unknown geography and environment. Culture shock is expected, but can interfere in attaining the maximum benefit of programs that are of very short duration. Pre-acculturation to the host country is a good way to diminish the effects of cultural and environmental differences on participants. While it is not always realistic to expect participants to learn a new language, the history of the culture, or the system of rapid transport before arriving in the country, much groundwork can be laid to alleviate difficulties in communication, trans-

portation, currency exchange, etc., before participants depart for the host country. A preparation seminar led by someone knowledgeable about the cultural nuances and social behavior basics in the host country would be ideal. At a minimum, mini-courses in language basics (including key phrases such as introductions, how to ask for help, and how to ask directions), currency exchange, and using rapid transport (as most European nations have) or how to deal with lack of rapid transport (as in most rural locations in the United States) will be very valuable. Such preparation cuts transition time in the new country and facilitates the exchange process. In addition, make sure participants are aware of climactic conditions to expect and of possible health issues that might be relevant during the exchange. Participants should bring adequate clothing and all medications necessary.

### The final step: evaluation

When the exchange has been concluded, both partners should be involved in several levels of evaluation. This can begin with a follow-up seminar, in which participants can solidify networking among home-country participants and increase the probability of organized, ongoing exchange and networking with contacts from the host country. In evaluating the program, participants should first evaluate its effectiveness, focusing on benefits, strengths, and weaknesses of the exchange. The initial goals and objectives should be referred to and changes recommended given the realities of the exchange process. Second, the exchange administrators should maintain communication in sharing their participants' evaluations and conducting their own

### Shots and vaccinations:

All participants should receive any necessary vaccinations. This should be done as soon as participants are sure they will be participating in the exchange, as some vaccinations require a series of shots administered over a period of time. Information about which shots are needed is available at most student health clinics or from health-care providers.

### Step 4: Evaluation

- Invite participant evaluations.
- Refer to goals and objectives.
- Maintain communication.

**Benchmark:** Faculty participants from GTCC and EUC-Syd were responsible for evaluating the exchange against its goals and objectives. Participants were able to report on many issues, including opportunities for a student exchange, similarities and differences within the two curricula, incorporating cross-cultural training methods, comparison of equipment and technology, comparison of certification and licensure requirements, support and participation in training, apprenticeship opportunities, challenges in culinary education, and standards for the industry. These were the areas earmarked for evaluation in the original goals and objectives.

evaluations of the exchange process, again identifying strengths, weaknesses, effectiveness, and benefits. Beyond this, administrators may conduct evaluations with college oversight committees.

### Spread the word

While the exchange is in progress, and especially after completion, exchange administrators will want to “spread the word” on the progress and success of the program. There are several ways to do this. The more traditional means of giving information to the public include the periodic newsletter, press releases, and workshops or seminars on this particular topic.

These are all good ways to share information, especially success stories, with the college and community. For a broader reach, use emerging technology

by placing a link on the college website to a page created for the exchange or adding exchange news and updates on the college’s regular listserv. These are good ways to reach a broad audience and generate interest in the program outside the local community.

### Advertise success:

- Workshops.
- Seminars.
- Websites.
- Listserv.
- Newsletters and press releases.

## Expanding a successful program

Options for expansion include expanding the number of programs involved and expanding the number of college partners. With each expansion, the work is expected to increase exponentially; the program becomes more and more time consuming. Program expansion can lead to the evolution of a position or even an office within the college that is responsible for ex-

change. The same basic process can be followed for each expansion, however. Following initial networking and contact, site visits and logistical details should be resolved, goals and objective established, and evaluations conducted.

In considering appropriate host countries, include less-developed countries on the list. The complementarity of strengths each country can bring to the exchange holds the potential for a mutually rewarding partnership.

**Benchmark:** Students involved in an exchange between KaHo Sint Lieven-Belgium and Peninsula Technikon-South Africa built a website to report on their three month exchange and give practical advice to those seeking to do an exchange. Their website can be accessed at: <http://eng.pentech.ac.za/exchange>

### Options for expansion:

- Number of programs.
- Number of partners.
- Expansion of services.

**The Trans-Atlantic Technology and Training Alliance, is network of leading technical and community colleges in the United States, Europe and South Africa managed by Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. in North Carolina and Learning Scotland in Glasgow. Through collaborative projects, conferences and research, the TA3 supports exchange, learning and innovation in technical education and regional economic development.**

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