

Leading a Globally Connected College: Opportunities, Resources, and the Role of Trustees

Student success and workforce development are at the heart of every community college mission. In an increasingly interconnected global economy, the ability to communicate effectively across borders and backgrounds, and to apply field-specific skills and knowledge in an array of geographic and cultural contexts is essential for graduates as they transition to the workforce – regardless of their field and where they ultimately live and work. Providing opportunities for students to acquire these skills is no longer an optional add-on to other curricular efforts, but a critical element of the student success and workforce preparation equation.

As access-focused institutions with deep local ties, community colleges – perhaps more than any other sector of higher education – are uniquely positioned to make global learning accessible to student and workforce populations who have often been excluded from such opportunities. By ensuring a robust and ongoing stream of globally competent graduates in a wide variety of fields, community colleges contribute to economic development and community vibrancy at the local, national, and international levels.

What is the role of trustees in facilitating and supporting global learning?


The board's mandate is to govern the institution through policy, guide institutional strategy, and monitor performance – with the interests of students and their success as the drivers of its work. In the realm of global learning and engagement, while the nuts and bolts of program development and operations are the purview of campus leaders, faculty, and staff, the support of the board goes a long way toward building sustainable initiatives that contribute to the overall mission and success of the college. Key trustee roles include:

Set the tone. Trustees' voices carry weight. Understanding the need for global learning and engagement, drawing the connection to the overall institutional mission and goals, and articulating the impact on campus and in the community sets a supportive tone to underpin this work. Concrete success stories (e.g., contributions by an international student to the local community, how students applied skills they learned through a virtual exchange experience in the classroom) and examples of personal interactions and experiences with global learning are especially powerful.

Ask the right questions. Given their fiduciary responsibility to the institution, trustees should attend particularly to student safety, well-being, and academic success, and to the impact of global learning and engagement on the overall health of the college. Raising questions about enrollment impacts, costs and revenue streams, institutional liability, and learning outcomes will ultimately ensure robust, sustainable activities and collective confidence in the work undertaken.

Make connections and build relationships. Given their leadership roles in their communities and the local economy, trustees are in an excellent position to see opportunities for partnerships among the college and local, national, and global companies, organizations, and other entities to promote global learning, knowledge exchange, and talent development. Bringing ideas to campus leaders, making introductions, and helping to build a network of resources to support global learning and engagement will help further expand the scope and impact of this work.





Consider board policy. ACCT advises boards to regularly – at least annually – review their policies. Such reviews are an opportune time to consider the impact of existing policies on global learning and engagement activities. What policies facilitate such work, and are there any that inadvertently hinder it? As global activities accelerate, boards might consider adding a dedicated policy item that articulates a commitment to global learning and engagement and specifies the board’s role.

What activities enable global learning and engagement, and how can colleges pursue them?

Global learning and engagement come in many shapes and sizes. Determining the “right” activities to undertake depends on an array of factors such as institutional mission, student population, size, staff and faculty interest and capacity, community characteristics, and budget, among others. Often initial activity happens as a result of a chance connection or opportunity that sparks interest; sometimes it is an intentional decision aligned with a specific institutional need. As institution leaders and trustees assess options and consider how to get started or expand upon current work, the following activities and strategies can inform planning and decision-making.

International student enrollment and support. Hosting international students can contribute to campus diversity, facilitate the development of intercultural communication skills in and outside the classroom, and boost enrollment numbers, benefiting all members of the campus community and the institution as a whole. It is important that institutions seeking to enroll international students ensure that adequate resources (e.g., academic support staff trained to assist with cultural adjustment) are in place; for institutions just starting out, hosting a few students and working closely with them to understand and support their experience is a good first step.

- *Align with the labor market.* Consider hosting international students in academic areas that align with local labor market needs (e.g., nursing). Consult local industry to identify high-demand areas and opportunities for apprenticeships and other programmatic collaboration.

- *Look to athletics.* International students can be an excellent addition to college teams in global sports such as basketball and baseball. Engaging the athletic department and coaches in both recruiting and student support planning is important in ensuring student success on and off the field.

- *Tap existing student support resources.* Campus offices such as a multicultural center, religious organizations and clubs, and the teaching and learning center are well positioned to compile resources specific to international student needs in their specialty areas.

Education abroad. Recognizing that many community college students have work and family obligations that preclude semester-long education abroad experiences, short-term (1-3 week) programs are typically a more accessible option. In recent years the international education field has made excellent strides toward developing good practices for academically rigorous short-term programs that maximize learning opportunities and outcomes.

- *Capitalize on faculty connections and expertise.* Faculty-led programs that embed a short experience abroad within a broader semester-long course allow instructors to tap their own academic connections, and use the time abroad to amplify content and skills taught on campus.
- *Establish trusted pathways.* Working with a limited number of partner institutions abroad to host students and establishing ongoing relationships with them prevents initial hurdles around credit transfer, safety protocols, and other sticking points from recurring, and provides opportunities to refine programs over time.
- *Consider working with education-abroad providers.* Non-profit and for-profit education-abroad providers bring specialized expertise in academic and logistical aspects of program development. Many both administer their own programs that are open to students from multiple institutions and offer program design and support for customized programs at individual institutions.
- *Tap scholarship resources.* The U.S. Department of State’s **Gilman Scholarship** program and the **Fund for Education Abroad** are examples of initiatives that specifically aim to increase the financial accessibility of education abroad for broader populations for students.

Curriculum and co-curriculum. Embedding global content and perspectives into on-campus student experiences ensures that all students have access to global learning — whether or not they travel outside the US. Leveraging on-campus and local off-campus resources enriches the student experience.

- *Explore virtual exchange.* The pandemic brought a spotlight to technology-enabled cross-border learning interactions. A robust community of virtual-exchange practitioners and programs — sometimes referred to as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) — has developed globally to engage in this work, and to provide resources for institutions and faculty to create classroom-to-classroom linkages and shared course content. These courses are often most successful when they employ standard technology and leverage student IT habits and expertise.
- *Connect on-campus resources.* Faculty are experts in their disciplines, but many also have deep geographic and cultural expertise that colleagues might tap to bring global perspectives into their course content. Academic staff with pedagogical expertise, such as those housed in a Center for Teaching and Learning, can help faculty review their syllabi and incorporate global content. Informal interest groups and learning communities can be a good way to surface expertise and interest in collaboration.
- *Host experts.* Given their deep community ties, community colleges are often well positioned to identify organizations or individuals with global expertise who might give a guest lecture or contribute to globally-focused co-curricular activities and programs. Consider hosting a [Fulbright scholar](#) through the [Outreach Lecturing Fund](#), or on a longer-term basis.

Global partnerships. Establishing ongoing and evolving relationships with key partner institutions outside the U.S. is an excellent way to link together the global learning opportunities detailed above, and to create growth and development opportunities for both partners.

- *Focus on shared interests and synergies.* Seek partners with programs in geographic areas with local ties (e.g. countries that have an industry presence in the state or community, or are the country of origin for a large immigrant population), or complementary academic programs. Local Chambers of Commerce, [Sister City](#) organizations, and cultural organizations can help identify potential geographic areas to target and specific institutions.
- *Start small but think big.* Allow ample time for relationship building, establishing communication protocols, and putting groundwork in place for successful partnerships by starting with just one concrete collaboration, and expanding from there. Beyond program operations, meet regularly with partners to assess activities, address problems when they arise, and consider potential new initiatives.

How can ACCT help?

- With our extensive network of US colleges and a growing set of contacts outside the US, ACCT is well positioned to connect potential partner institutions and organizations, point colleges toward resources and programs, and provide advice and assistance on program development. Be sure to follow updates in the Global Learning and Engagement section on [ACCT Connect](#).

Contact

Robin Matross Helms

ACCT Vice President, Membership and Educational Services
rhelms@acct.org

