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THE GLOBAL CAMPUS

Thinking Locally, Acting Globally

Public research universities seek to make a difference, at home and abroad, by forming strategic partnerships

By SARA HEBEL

Indianapolis

Seventeen years ago, a group of doctors from the Indiana University School of Medicine began working with Moi University, in Kenya, to build a medical school in Eldoret, an industrial city in the country's rural western highlands. The partnership was the beginning of a long and evolving relationship between the two institutions.

Today Moi and Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, where the medical school is located, run extensive programs in AIDS prevention and treatment, which help more than 42,000 HIV-positive patients each month. At any given time, about 40 doctors, medical students, and others from Indiana work alongside their colleagues in Kenya, treating patients and helping survivors to rebuild their lives.

The two universities also created a program that, supported by foundation money and federal grants, provides food for tens of thousands of AIDS patients and their families, treats pregnant women to prevent transmission of HIV to babies, and trains those living with the disease to support themselves through sustainable farming practices and small-business enterprises. This year the Academic Model for the Prevention and Treatment of HIV/AIDS, as the multipart effort is known, was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Robert M. Einterz, associate dean for international programs at Indiana's School of Medicine and one of the founders of the partnership, says the endeavor grew out of a simple desire to improve health care in Kenya.

"We have enormous resources at this university," he says, "and we wanted to take those and focus on solving the problems at hand."

His sentiment is an increasingly common one at public research universities across the United States. As globalization reshapes academic disciplines as well as regional economies, these institutions have begun to see their public-service missions in global terms. And they are forging new kinds of international partnerships to expand upon their expertise in fields of particular importance to the developing world, such as health, agriculture, and the environment.

American universities have long been involved in research and service work abroad. But as Indiana-Purdue's Kenya venture illustrates, they are now taking a more deliberate and comprehensive approach to where and how they invest their time, money, and talent. Many hire senior-level administrators to coordinate international projects across disciplines. They are rewarding faculty members who lead these ambitious projects and are providing institutional grants to get them off the ground. They are also searching for ways to involve students — all while looking to bring the benefits of this work back to their home states.

"We serve the local community by connecting it to the broader world," says Susan B. Sutton, associate dean for international programs at Indiana-Purdue.

Long-Term Ties

For Indiana, the impact of globalization can be seen in the state's growing immigrant population from Mexico and the desire of its large pharmaceutical industry to expand its ties with China. Indiana-Purdue is developing programs in those countries and elsewhere with such global issues in mind. Eventually, says Ms. Sutton, the university hopes to have as many as 10 such strategic partnerships around the world.

Like many universities, Indiana-Purdue, which enrolls about 30,000 students, has accumulated scores of international agreements, known as memoranda of understanding, that faculty members negotiated on their own with counterparts abroad. In some cases, those arrangements have fostered strong collaborative research or faculty exchanges. But often, university administrators say, the efforts turn out to have little import, seldom extending beyond their originators, if there is any follow-up at all.

After Ms. Sutton took over as associate dean, in 2003, she began looking for ways to establish longer-term ties with global partners, ties that might have a broader impact on campus and abroad. About two years ago, seeing the inroads that the medical school was making through its relationship with Moi, she began exploring ways that faculty members in other disciplines could expand the partnership.

Now members of the university's School of Informatics are creating interactive, computer-based training programs to help Kenyan doctors learn about how AIDS progresses. And social-work professors are helping Kenyan colleagues develop a curriculum for a new bachelor's-degree program at Moi.

Other public universities are taking a similarly multilayered approach to their overseas partnerships. They often involve the same regions.

Michigan State University is building on agricultural research it has been doing for decades in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to include projects on science education, health, and veterinary medicine that broaden the way the countries tackle issues such as climate change and disease.

North Carolina State University and Oregon State University, among others, are developing faculty exchanges and research programs in China and other Asian countries, related to such subjects as agriculture, trade, and disaster preparedness.

"We need to change how we do business, so in some countries we do it in a holistic way," says Jeffrey M. Riedinger, dean of international studies and programs at Michigan State. "We are not living in neat college disciplines."

Benefits Back Home

As Indiana-Purdue expands its reach abroad, it promotes the benefits of such ventures at home.

D. Craig Brater, dean of the medical school, says the opportunity to work in Kenya draws applicants to the school. The medical students who complete rotations there, he adds, come back as better doctors. They learn how to interact with patients from other cultures and how to think on their feet when they cannot rely on the technologies available at American hospitals.

"They see they don't need all the bells and whistles to take care of patients," says Dr. Brater. "You can get by by using your brain."

Deans and faculty members in other colleges at Indiana say the medical school's long-term relationship with Moi University has made it easier for them to get involved.

"Oftentimes, before you can do business, you have to be friends, and that is especially true in Kenya," says David A. Ford, associate dean for research and graduate programs at the School of Liberal Arts at Indiana-Purdue, who is writing a paper with colleagues from Moi on controlling domestic violence in both

Kenya and in the United States. His university's contacts with Moi, he says, have enabled him to talk about abuse with Kenyan women who may not have agreed to meet with him otherwise.

Other universities and their states also benefit from global relationships. Mr. Riedinger says farmers in Michigan learn how to breed better varieties of potatoes and other crops by exchanging information about agricultural genetic materials with Michigan State's partners in China.

Cardiologists and nutritionists at Virginia Commonwealth University have shared research with its partners in Italy and Spain to gain insights into how a Mediterranean diet might help them treat patients with diabetes and other health problems.

As Indiana-Purdue continues to expand its international work, Ms. Sutton says, officials are careful to choose projects that can be built across disciplines and offer benefits to Indianapolis.

Over the past few years it became clear to her that the university could play a role in

helping the region improve relations with Mexico, for instance. Indianapolis has a small but growing proportion of Hispanic residents, a trend that has led to tensions in some neighborhoods.

It is important for the university, she says, to help students, faculty members, and local residents understand a country to which theirs is so intricately tied. "We share a population, we share a history, and we share an economy," she says.

Indiana-Purdue is building on its connections to a small network of institutions in Mexico. Among them are the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon, in Monterrey, where a nursing professor from the Indianapolis campus helped to establish Mexico's first doctoral program in nursing, in 2001, and the Universidad Autónoma de Hidalgo, in central Mexico, where students and faculty members from Indiana-Purdue's schools of medicine, dentistry, and public health go each year to provide basic care and health education.

The university is also turning to members of the local community and the government, including a representative from the Indiana governor's office, to help it shape its programs in Mexico. Juana O. Watson, senior adviser for Latino and immigrant affairs to Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels Jr., a Republican, grew up in Hidalgo. She applauds the Indianapolis institution's efforts to improve state residents' understanding of Mexico, and she works with the university on its projects near her hometown.

She encourages Indiana-Purdue to use its expertise in business, agriculture, and trade to help Mexican farmers deal with the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The farmers will need help, she says, in responding to price fluctuations in corn and other crops that are expected next year. Others could use help organizing cooperatives to reap higher prices from selling coffee certified as a product of fair trade.

Those are ideas that university officials say they will explore.

Encouraging Business Exchanges

Indiana-Purdue and others are paying attention to China as well, in part to help local companies tap into emerging markets.

North Carolina State created a China center last year and has forged partnerships with several Chinese universities. Bailian Li, vice provost for international affairs, says he wants to foster collaborations that help students prepare for work in a global economy.

He wants to help North Carolina's economy, too, in which the manufacturing sector has dwindled. With its Chinese partners, the university has pursued research on commodities important to the state, engaging in joint projects on textile production and mapping the genetic composition of tobacco.

Indiana-Purdue is working with Sun Yat-sen University, in Guangzhou, on drug and food safety — a growing concern in the United States, for whom China has become a major supplier of pharmaceuticals.

Professors from the two universities are organizing a conference on food and drug safety to be held in China this winter.

Among the speakers will be Ping Poulsen, president of Safis Solutions LLC, in Indianapolis, which helps pharmaceutical companies and medical-device manufacturers create safe products and navigate U.S. regulatory systems to bring them to market.

Ms. Poulsen, who already has clients in China, says the university's partnership with Sun Yat-sen could help her not only expand her business connections in the country but also work with Sun Yat-sen as it creates a program to improve food and drug policies there.

In international markets, she notes, when product safety is a problem anywhere, "it is not just one country's issue, it's a global issue."

Indiana-Purdue's involvement with China also includes a project on its home campus. With financing from the Chinese government, the university will establish a Confucius Institute, which is expected to offer Chinese-language training and arrange cultural events. The proposal has gained the backing of businesses and other groups in Indiana, including the state's education department, Indianapolis's art museum, and Eli Lilly and Company, the pharmaceutical giant based in the city.

Pamela W. Anderson, a physician in Lilly's medical division, notes that more than 800 Chinese employees work for the company in Indianapolis. Yet, she says, few community-based opportunities exist to help them sustain their cultural heritage. Lilly hopes to lure top researchers from around the world to central Indiana, she says, and "this is a chance to broaden the city's horizons."

Grand plans rarely come without big challenges, of course. University administrators and professors alike say the reward systems at many universities often don't effectively compensate faculty members who get involved in international efforts. As a result, it can be difficult to gain widespread support on campus for some ambitious interdisciplinary projects.

Faculty members who want to participate in international programs at Indiana-Purdue can apply for money for travel and a grant of up to $15,000 from a university fund to help them get started. They can also turn to the international-affairs office for logistical support as they seek contacts abroad or plan travel.

But Mathew J. Palakal, associate dean for research and graduate programs at the School of Informatics, says the university lacks an effective way to reward faculty members who devote time to international work along with their other teaching and research responsibilities.

Mr. Palakal has helped Moi University set up a small wireless computer lab and is working with his counterparts there to revise their computer-science curriculum and to build a database of information about more than a dozen indigenous tribes in Kenya whose cultures are disappearing.

He is excited about his work, which he sees as an opportunity to improve the lives of people around the globe. Nevertheless, he says, many professors are deterred from participating because of the extra time it takes to apply for grants to sustain international work and to collaborate with foreign partners. Faculty evaluations in many schools also do not distinguish between local and international service work, he says, even though the latter can be considerably harder to pull off.

Ms. Sutton, the associate dean for international programs, acknowledges the disincentives and says she wants the university to do more to help faculty members who are involved globally, such as by offering fellowships or reduced teaching responsibilities.

Some universities have adopted campuswide strategies to encourage widespread participation in their international efforts. At Virginia Commonwealth, faculty members and deans are asked during their annual reviews to explain how they have contributed to the collaborations the university has developed with 15 key partners, including institutions in Brazil, China, India, and Russia.

Before he took over as executive director of the university's international-education office, in 2003, Peter S.

Kirkpatrick, an associate professor of French, says he and his colleagues in the language departments were often active in international work but were never sure how much their dean or the university really cared. He intends to make the message clear now: "We want the university as a whole to buy into these relationships."

Catching Fire

Sometimes barriers to involvement are deeply rooted. When Ms. Sutton first proposed expanding Indiana-Purdue's relationship with Moi University, she says some faculty members dismissed the idea, arguing that they couldn't see how the partnership would further their research.

Hopeful that some skeptics might change their minds if they visited Kenya, she took a group of deans to Eldoret to see the work being done by the medical school there, talk with their counterparts, and explore collaborative possibilities.

"They caught fire," Ms. Sutton says, and returned to the campus ready to brainstorm ideas for the partnership and recruit champions for it among their faculties.

Charles R. Bantz, chancellor of Indiana-Purdue, says that although the university focuses its international work on a small set of priorities, faculty members are still encouraged to develop partnerships with colleagues abroad, wherever their interest or research takes them. The university also has many smaller research partnerships, in countries including Indonesia and Thailand.

But by selecting only a handful of key partners, he says, a regional university like his can really make a difference globally.

Mr. Bantz recalls a visit to Eldoret last fall during which a woman with AIDS, who was participating in a job-skills workshop affiliated with the medical-school partnership, said that before she began treatment through the universities' joint programs, she had assumed that she would be dead by then.

"You can actually have an impact," Mr. Bantz says. "In 10 years you can look back and say something really happened."

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Section: International
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