



Using Innovation Hubs as Global Educational Collaboration Centers: Changing the International Educational Model



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Introduction

This study examined the potential **use of innovation hubs** as mechanisms to improve international education partnerships.

1) **Innovation hubs** can, in theory, be **useful mechanisms** to bind together partner schools in new ways – collaborative teaching, new product/process research, and technology commercialization.

2) Faculty, international office staff, innovation hub staff, and students all see **benefits** of an innovation hub-based partnership.

3) Many **challenges exist** to successful implementation, but each of the schools we examined already had some initiatives in place that, based on the research literature, should facilitate adoption of this new model.

What is an innovation hub?

Four key dimensions

An innovation hub provides a learning environment that supports the exchange and development of ideas.

(Gryszkiewicz & Friederici, 2014)

(a) supports a voluntary, self-directed, collaborative community

(b) consists of a diverse, heterogeneous membership

(c) includes physical and/or digital spaces designed to promote creative, collaborative work

(d) brings a global, entrepreneurial culture to a particular location.

(Toivonen & Friederici, 2015)

How can innovation hubs create valuable new approaches to global educational collaborations?

Our key points:

Current state: International partnerships mainly consist of inbound and outbound students who spend one semester taking classes at the partner school.

Desired state: Ongoing collaboration through joint class projects, faculty research, and long-term relationships among students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Gap: Most efforts at enriched collaboration are ad-hoc. Structures, tools, processes, and rewards need to be in place to facilitate and incentivize on-going project-based exchanges. Change management processes are needed to implement hub model.

The institutions we studied



University of Potsdam: Public German University, approx. 20,400 students



Existing Partner



Clarkson University: U.S. Private University, approx. 3000 students



Existing Partner

**H
T
W
G**

Hochschule Konstanz
University of Applied Sciences

HTWG Konstanz: German University of Applied Sciences, approx. 4800 students

All three schools are members of NAFSA and accredited by either international, national, or regional accreditation agencies.

Qualitative data collection

- **Data collection** from November 2016 - March 2017
- Interviews (in person, via Skype and via email) with students, faculty, and staff at all three schools.
- Eight questions about facilities, programs, community, and willingness to collaborate around innovation.
- **Data analysis** from March 2017 – May 2017
- Two researchers coded responses into categories. Any differences were resolved by consensus.

Dimensions of innovation hubs

at the three schools

School	Physical Space	Expertise	Existing Partnerships	Collaborative Community	Orientation toward Innovation Collaboration	Faculty/ Staff Interviews	Student Interviews
Univ. Potsdam	Multiple large spaces	Significant	Many	Significant	Positive	4	7
HTWG-Konstanz	Small space	Moderate	Many	Moderate	Mixed	1	4
Clarkson Univ.	Small space	Significant	Many	Moderate	Positive	4	16

Insights: Faculty and staff

Important Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entrepreneurial mind-set• Diverse backgrounds• Experimental• Joint goal• Fun• Different disciplines and faculties
Student Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skill development - different perspectives and mindsets• Entrepreneurial mind-set• Intercultural competencies
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expenses/effort vs. effect• Curriculum / Recognition and transfer of credits• Academic incentives• Lack of time and resources• Organizational effort• Coordination between different faculties• Responsibilities <p>n=9</p>

Insights: Students

Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practical approach, realistic cases• Realistic atmosphere compared to possible future jobs• Sharing different experiences
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication• Different attitudes towards working behaviors
Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online courses• Summer workshops• Face-to-face projects
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email, Skype, Google Hangout, WhatsApp, Facebook
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-person meetings• Better understanding the need for proper organization, task sharing• New contacts and friendships
Drawbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cumbersome communication• Time differences, long waiting• No personal meetings

What we learned

- Radical approaches to international collaboration are not advisable; **evolutionary change** may be better.
- **Participation** from the bottom up is necessary.
- Transparent **communication** is critical.
- A clear **vision** should be shared with stakeholders.
- Concrete **planning & appropriate student workload** are important.
- Innovation hubs should only be pursued if they **align with existing skills & organizational goals** (e.g. technical schools with some focus on innovation or entrepreneurship).

Recommended strategies

In general, we recommend experimenting with global collaboration in the form of joint (innovation) projects. This can represent a change process at the universities that extends the traditional model of exchange partnerships.

**Early
Face-to-Face
Interactions &
Project Definition**

- **Kick-off Meeting**
- **Scope Definition, Responsibilities**
- **Skills and Knowledge Inventory**

**Process
Management**

- **Mentoring**
- **Status Reports**
- **Feedback**

(Kärkkäinen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013)

Recommended strategies

**Establish
Information &
Communication
Systems**

- **Use Adequate Technology**
- **Contact Times and Frequency**
- **Information Sharing / Information Events**

**Facilitate
Participation**

- **Working Groups**
- **Online Surveys**
- **Best Practices**

Provide Support

- **Tools and Instruction**
- **Funding and Sponsors**
- **Methodological Support / Benchmarking**

(Kärkkäinen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013)

What's next?

Future research

Closer study of joint innovation projects in terms of

- **student learning outcomes**
- **enhanced commercialization**
- **collaborative research productivity**
- **higher student satisfaction levels**

in both innovation hub activities and international partnership activities.

Educational practice

- **Could a network of innovation hubs facilitate virtual team innovation projects and long term exchanges between stakeholders?**
- **Could innovation hubs become the new “International Center” on campuses?**
- **Which formats might work?**

Thank you for your attention!

Questions and suggestions are welcome!

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