

University of Florida SACS Proposal

Proposal for the Self-Study Focus Expanding Our International Perspective: The University of Florida's Plan for Globalizing Education

Profile of the University of Florida

The University of Florida is a public, land-grant research university, ranked as one of three most comprehensive in the United States, encompassing virtually all academic and professional disciplines. Student enrollment at the bachelor, master and doctoral levels is approximately 45,000. UF is the oldest and largest of Florida's ten universities and is a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU). Its faculty and staff are dedicated to the common pursuit of the university's threefold mission: education (teaching), research and service.

These three interlocking elements span all of the university's academic disciplines and multidisciplinary centers and represent the university's obligation to lead and serve the needs of the nation, all of Florida's citizens, and the public and private educational systems of Florida by pursuing and disseminating new knowledge while building upon the past.

The University of Florida is committed to providing knowledge, benefits and services with quality and effectiveness to its students and the citizens of Florida. It aspires to further national and international recognition for its initiatives and achievement in promoting human values and improving the quality of life.

The logic for an international focus

The justification for placing internationalization as a priority goal is a direct outgrowth of UF's purpose, mission and goals. UF is the oldest and largest of Florida's ten universities and a member of the AAU dedicated to a threefold mission: teaching, research and service. Additionally, UF "aspires to further national and international recognition for its initiatives and achievements in promoting human values and improving the quality of life." A global perspective is an essential, vital component in UF's ability to accomplish this mission, and to continually enhance its standing among the very best public institutions in the nation and to gain recognition of its achievements. A global perspective also assists a large yet dynamic institution like UF in rethinking its mission, broadening its vision and reflecting on its role in an ever changing world.

It is equally important that the University of Florida position itself to prepare students for the global community of which they will certainly be a part. The rapid development of the global community as a result of the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the Internet has changed the face of the world, and increasing numbers of our students are taking positions outside the United States. The State of Florida is actively engaged in global outreach, especially in Latin America. For our students and state to be successful in this new environment, it is crucial that the University's education programs provide them with knowledge, understanding and experience of internationalization. Education is the one essential commodity in the new global community. And, our education program ought to ensure that University of Florida students can make the transition to any part of the world comfortably and successfully.

EDUCATION: Teaching is the fundamental purpose of the university, and along with research and scholarship, is the basis of the education process. In preparing students for a lifetime of intellectual growth, UF could no more ignore the outside world than it could ignore advances in technology. Providing students an international perspective serves them and the education process in many ways. It makes their time at UF more productive and rewarding. The UF community is as diverse as our nation and our world. UF has students from over 100 countries, all 50 states and all 67 counties in Florida. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds. In addition to over 4,000 international students there are 3,900 of Hispanic origin, 2,700 African American and 2,500 Asian-Americans. Understanding the cultural differences in such a diverse population will promote tolerance, greater harmony and a better learning environment. It will encourage students to respect other points of view as they learn to formulate and articulate their own.

Another integral part of a UF education is a concern for values and ethics. Students, faculty and staff can better assume the responsibility for those qualities through greater internationalization. By understanding the values and ethics of others, they will be better able to appreciate and put into practice their own.

Greater internationalization of UF will better prepare students for their careers after they graduate. It will provide not just an addition to their resume, but will help them adapt to the workplace. In an economy that will continue to become more globalized, many UF alumni will have the opportunity to travel and work overseas. They may have clients and business associates abroad. At a minimum, as they rise up in their

respective organizations to positions of greater responsibility, they will be confronted with supervising a work force that is increasingly diverse. Success in all these endeavors will greatly benefit from a genuine appreciation for individual differences and cultural diversity gained through an international outlook.

Greater internationalization of the curriculum will make it more relevant to the students and to the world in which they will work. Since many of them will change careers several times before they retire, a greater appreciation gained through their courses of a broader perspective will help them adjust to these changes. Curriculum is also key to internationalization because a majority of students will not likely find the resources and time to participate in study abroad programs even if they are greatly expanded and highly successful. The content of courses taken on campus will therefore have to provide the main international experiences that many, if not most, students will have. Language instruction, for instance, can make a major contribution in this regard. The 23 languages taught at UF provide not only the vocabulary and grammar, but also a window to foreign culture for those who take advantage of this opportunity.

RESEARCH: Since research can be defined as creative activity that contributes to the international public conversation about the advancement of knowledge, it too will be enhanced by greater internationalization. Research will not make as meaningful a contribution if it does not take into account where that international public conversation has been, where it is currently and in what direction it is moving. No field is unaffected by international developments and no faculty member can afford to ignore developments in his or her field simply because they happen abroad. An international outlook helps faculty carry out their research function and it also helps them in their teaching function. Interaction with foreign scholars will allow their research to enrich UF's scholarship and curriculum. Since they are part of a university community that is inherently and increasingly diverse, a better understanding of other cultures will aid their communication with and instruction of their students.

SERVICE: As a public institution, UF serves both the nation and the state of Florida in educating and preparing future generations for leadership positions in virtually every field of endeavor. Currently one out of every five new jobs created in the U.S. is directly dependent on the international economy and the percentage is even higher for Florida. Just as an international dimension to a UF education will help prepare its

graduates to compete in today's economy, it will make our country and state more competitive. As one of the leading institutions of higher education in the country, UF has a tremendous wealth of human talent and experience that can and should be brought to bear on problems outside Florida and the United States. The active promotion of an international orientation for the university will help make that kind of service possible.

Specific Goals of the Self-Study

The University of Florida seeks to:

1. Assess the extent of internationalization that currently exists on campus as it relates to teaching, research, scholarship and public service.
2. Establish goals for the further internationalization of the academic programs and curriculum at the University and establish a process for assessing the implementation of those goals.
3. Create specific academic goals for undergraduates to enable them upon graduation to successfully function within the global community.
4. Determine the feasibility and the ways of enhancing the international diversity component of the general education program.
5. Identify institutional needs to provide incentives to encourage faculty and students to pursue international research, exchange and educational initiatives and opportunities.
6. Examine ways to seamlessly incorporate overseas study into the undergraduate and graduate programs.
7. Develop qualitative measures to assess faculty and student involvement in furthering internationalization of the University of Florida.