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Editor's Reflections: Developing New Programs in Peace and Conflict Studies

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Editor's Reflections: Developing New Programs in Peace and Conflict Studies

Abstract

Excerpt

The field of peace and conflict studies has grown remarkably around the globe over the past few decades. In this new millennium, there will be a greater number of educational offerings being considered or launched in various higher education institutions, for the community and the world are in need of such interdisciplinary inquiries and multi-professional applications. As a long-time academic facilitator and administrator, I would like to take this opportunity to share with the PCS readers some of my experiences and observations in this arena, from an administrative and financial perspective. My hope is to assist colleagues and students in initiating more programs in peace and conflict studies across campuses.

Keywords: *curriculum proposal, higher education institutions, new academic program, peace and conflict studies, strategic plan*

Author Bio(s)

Honggang Yang is the Dean and Professor at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) at NSU. He is an anthropologist by training, and worked for The Carter Presidential Center of Emory University. He chaired and taught in the Antioch program in conflict resolution. He has served on several leadership councils and boards, and is currently on the editorial boards for Conflict Resolution Quarterly, and American Review of China Studies. In 1998-1999, he launched the distance learning programs in conflict resolution at the SHSS with the support of his colleagues and students. His specialties include reflective practice, distance and experiential learning, and ethnographic methods.

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The field of peace and conflict studies has grown remarkably around the globe over the past few decades. In this new millennium, there will be a greater number of educational offerings being considered or launched in various higher education institutions, for the community and the world are in need of such interdisciplinary inquiries and multi-professional applications. As a long-time academic facilitator and administrator, I would like to take this opportunity to share with the PCS readers some of my experiences and observations in this arena, from an administrative and financial perspective. My hope is to assist colleagues and students in initiating more programs in peace and conflict studies across campuses.

As known, proposing a new academic program is often required to go through a series of review steps on different levels. The proposal components usually include an overview delineated in the institutional contexts, needs assessment, objectives and roles of the proposed curriculum, program delivery formats, admissions and graduation requirements, marketing analyses, student career paths, accreditation considerations, program assessments, potential program duplication issues, and resources needed for the program implementation. The focus of this piece is on some administrative aspects rather than the whole processes, as many times we see fine proposals being delayed or rejected due to their insufficient attention to some seemingly trivial technicalities and managerial protocols embedded in the contemporary university structures.

A good fit between the proposed program and its university's mission, visions, and strategic plan is a necessary condition for developing a new program; however, it may not be sufficient because many universities and colleges have recently been challenged in coping with a variety of fiscal issues resembling those dynamics long facing corporate and non-profit sectors. As a new curriculum initiator, you and your colleagues may be required to address both revenue and expense questions associated with the new program proposal (e.g., who is paying for it?). As known, there are typically the following sources of revenue on campus: tuitions and funds through either legislative appropriation or independent collection; gifts and endowments via donation; grants and contracts from international, federal, state, local, or private funding agencies; and other auxiliary service incomes.

On the other end, the expenses or costs are commonly incurred from human resources (salaries and fringes for faculty, staff, graduate assistants, and consultants), facility resources (classrooms, skills-building space, and experiential learning clinics), technological resources (computers, phones, learning software, and teaching equipment), information and library resources (holdings, books, journals, and CDs), to the resources for program support activities (mailings, travel, and office supplies).

The revenue calculation for a new program is correlated to the student enrollment size, tuition rates, academic calendar, admissions cycle, and additional sources of available income. There must be an anticipated balance between revenue and cost. The more revenue-generating options beyond the tuition dollars, the

merrier, as the success of the due processes will be more assured, with multiple resources. It is always a good idea to prepare early, for example, by identifying and applying for grants and/or cultivating potential donors.

In this connection, there are at least five working approaches or strategies for institutional settings where there are limited resources or even a shortage of financial means:

1. Building on the existing coursework and programs within the college by initiating an undergraduate minor or a graduate concentration in peace and conflict studies. There are many discipline-based departments on campus that have pedagogical elements of peace and conflict such as anthropology, area studies (African Studies, Asian American Studies, Hispanic Studies), communications, economics, fine arts, history, industrial relations, international relations, law, political science, psychology, sociology, theater, and urban planning, to name a few. The beauty of making such efforts is that it does not require much seed money to get it off the ground. Some of the challenges include the philosophical differences between disciplines, historical issues and debates, inter-professional tensions, and methodological preferences found in the “hosting” programs.
2. Offering a certificate program. Credit hours of such an offering are lower than the full degree programs, and thus running it is supposed to be more inexpensive and efficient. However, it can still serve as an initial base for the new program organizers to build up the momentum, reaching out to a critical mass on campus and in the community. A training certificate without degree credit is another feasible idea at a preliminary stage, and so is launching a workshop series (or developing electives, symposiums and exhibits) related to your passions and interests in peace and conflict studies.
3. Obtaining a grant for a peace and conflict research project or for a community outreach undertaking. This is an indirect but pragmatic approach to heightening the campus awareness of the fundability for such programming endeavors down the road. It may give you an effective platform to get the constituencies organized as well.
4. Planning for a non-traditional delivery format that overcomes the geographic and time constraints for student recruitment. More and more disciplines and professions have been moving into this learning technology-mediated arena over the recent years. A hybrid model can embrace the best of both worlds: A face-to-face learning on site that is intensive and flexibly scheduled, and a real-time (synchronized) learning environment on line with non-real time (asynchronized) options. This innovative format can also avoid the sensitive problem or perception of competing for students and taking away from the existing programs.
5. Partnering with other sister colleges where peace and conflict studies are offered. Intellectually, not one academic entity has all the experts or

specialists in the related fields. With thoughtful partnerships, students and educators will have access to a diverse learning world. This win-win approach (e.g., joint degree programs, dual admissions, faculty consortiums, internship and practicum exchanges, and so forth) is promising, and also gives an invaluable opportunity for peace researchers and conflict resolution specialists to practice what we preach. As far as the revenue sharing and cost-splitting dimensions are concerned, collaborative parties may find it fair and handy to apply a middle-ground solution to make it equitable and sustainable. Resources are always limited as we know, but by teaming up together we can maximize their utilization to go the distance.

It is fascinating to observe that the non-academic factors and financial issues often bring down the pluralistic academic formations. The new program initiators must make certain adaptations when applying the above strategies to their specific institutional environments. My reflective account in this spring issue is not a conclusive summary of the best practices, but rather is intended to extend an invitation to you and your colleagues, as there are lots of wonderful stories for us to learn and to share with each other.

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Dr. Sean Byrne,	2002-May 2003
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