

*Why do we need ACES Global Connect anyway?  
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February 2003*

### How to Deal with Servants

The University of Illinois, like most of its Land Grant University peers, got serious about the business of international agriculture in the 1950's. This was the dawn of the age of institution building in developing countries. Through the auspices of the Agency for International Development (AID), the American government mobilized American colleges of agriculture to create similar colleges in Asian, African, and South American countries. Illinois got involved in 1952, and it was among the first American universities that were awarded large contracts to build such institutions. And build them we did. Two agricultural universities in India—Madhya Pradesh Agricultural University and Uttar Pradesh Agricultural University—are in existence because of the leadership and efforts of our former College of Agriculture. If you travel to India today, more than 30 years after the job was completed, you will discover that Indian scientists, educators, and politicians clearly understand and appreciate what we did for them.

Building a college in a foreign country is much more than doing research with a foreign collaborator—or sending students abroad for a semester. The institution building business required that we harness and mobilize the resources of our entire college to create something from nothing on foreign soil. What were the local needs—and politics? Would the American Land Grant model be relevant? What sort of land was available? How many departments? What sort of administration? We also had to bring large numbers of scientists and teachers here, train them thoroughly, get them back home, and somehow mold them into faculties.

These goals could only be achieved if Illinois faculty were willing to interrupt their everyday professional activities, and usually those of their families, get on a plane, and go live in a foreign country. Between 1954 and 1973, 47 Illinois faculty did just that in India alone. They lived in India for periods ranging from a few months to several years, and they did everything from assisting in sugar beet processing projects to advising the Indian government on the enabling legislation for the new institutions. Two of our former faculty even wrote a how to do it book on overseas missions. Included were chapters on topics ranging from putting your stateside affairs in mothballs to dealing with servants.

We started building foreign institutions long before there was a formal office of international agriculture in the college. Although our faculty were key to the success of these projects, everything was coordinated centrally at the campus level. Then in 1967, the College established an Office of International Agricultural Programs to formalize and administer our institution-building projects. Ten years later this office was renamed the Office of International Agriculture (OIA). Its director assumed the status of associate dean, and its scope of activities began to increase. Although the OIA continued to concentrate on elements of institution building in foreign countries, words like “strengthen” and “expand” began to enter our vocabulary by the 1980s.

The numbers tell the story of a focus that remained expansive. In 1984, for example, OIA received a \$15.2 million, Phase I contract for institutional development at the Northwest Frontier Province Agricultural University in Peshawar, Pakistan. This was followed by \$7.4 million of Phase II funding. OIA simultaneously managed a multimillion dollar contract to strengthen Egerton University in Kenya and a \$10 million dollar agricultural research and extension project in Zambia. During this time, OIA also was heavily vested in the INTSOY program to expand the human food use potential of soybeans. A similar program, INTERPAKS, came into existence to strengthen the ability of foreign institutions to deliver information to rural clientele.

During this period hundreds of foreign students arrived on our campus for advanced degree training to prepare them for key roles in our institution-building projects. Many others came for short courses organized by INTSOY and INTERPAKS. Later OIA began to develop exchange programs with overseas institutions, so that Illinois students could wider access to international experiences as part of their undergraduate education.

#### Legacy of the OIA

In spite of these successes, the OIA was disbanded at the time of college reorganization in 1996. Student exchange programs were transferred to the Office of Academic Programs, and research-oriented activities went, not surprisingly, to the Office of Research. The disappearance of a formal office of international agriculture in the College of ACES has been the subject of much speculation—then as now. Two reasons, one hard and one softer, have been regularly cited as justification for the change.

By the early 1990s, there was hard evidence that changes in federal policy were afoot. Money, especially from AID, was simply not available for large institutional projects in

agriculture, and so both the scope and the financial base of OIA became greatly diminished. The loss of ICR dollars, which had provided a secure funding base for the OIA for decades, had a profound day-to-day impact. At the same time, there was a heightened, largely intangible sense that international project-based activities, especially those in research, were becoming separated—even disconnected—from core activities in the college mission areas. These trends led to a reasonable recommendation from the college reorganizers: If international activities are to thrive in ACES, they need to be integrated into the mission areas. And so they were.

The disappearance of the OIA has left an imprint on ACES, especially on senior faculty who were here during the glory years of the office and who participated in its activities. There is a lot of institutional pride in our impact on agriculture in developing nations. Many of the foreign students who received their training at Illinois under the auspices of OIA are now leaders and tell us how much they value their education in this country—and the opportunity to return the favor to us.

But in subsuming international activities into the mission areas, we have also heightened the impression that something has been lost. The commitment of the college to international activities has been questioned by our own faculty and campus administration. And externally, there is a sense that in dissolving the OIA, ACES got out of the business of international agriculture. These are impressions that may not square with the facts, but they are commonly held nonetheless.

The OIA left another sort of legacy, one that is subtly and deeply embedded in the psyche of this College (and many of our peers, for that matter). This is the legacy of geographical orientation, the almost imperceptible assumption that international activities are mostly about travel to foreign countries—or the hosting in some way of students, faculty, or other passport bearing visitors who travel here from other lands. There also may be a subtle developing nation bias, the sense that when we travel to other places and when they travel here, we have more to offer than they do. These undercurrents may make perfect sense in the light of our past activities, but we need to ask whether this is the sole or even the most appropriate framework for our thoughts as we plan the future.

#### New and Improved

When it disbanded the OIA, the College of ACES never intended to permanently delete all formal administrative structures for international activities. Rather, the College proposed to

build something anew. The task of visioning and defining the new structure commenced immediately after reorganization and fell largely to the International Activities Policy Committee. Other interested faculty and the assistant deans with responsibilities for student exchanges (Office of Academic Programs) and research (Office of Research) were also active. Between 1996 and 2001, these groups met formally and informally to pencil out the future form of the College's international dimension. The concept that we now know as ACES Global Connect (AGC) began to appear in the year 2000, and by 2001, the College had approved plans to hire both a director and an associate director. Searches were initiated, and candidates were interviewed, but then the effects of post-911 began to seriously (and ironically, given their underlying causes) constrain our budget for international engagement.

ACES Global Connect ultimately sprang to life at the onset of the Fall 2002 semester. Rather than a pair of new hires with a mandate for implementation, AGC arose as a cross-cutting platform staffed by part-timers. Four individuals currently are responsible for its programs:

- Steve Pueppke, Associate Dean for Research. Part-time appointment as Interim Director of ACES Global Connect.
- John Santas, Associate Director of ACES Global Connect. Part-time appointment.
- Andrea Bohn, Assistant Dean for Academic Programs. Part-time assignment for student exchanges.
- Richard Vogen, Director of College Planning. Part-time assignment.

#### So what is ACES Global Connect?

AGC got its initial marching orders from a set of principles that were laid out during the planning process—and in fact used as justification to create the organization. Here they are, copied verbatim from the planning document:

#### ***Leadership***

- *Advancing ACES to a vanguard position in goal and priority setting—and implementation—at the national and international levels.*
- *Assuming a visible and productive leadership role on campus, especially as it relates to the Office of the Associate Provost for International Affairs.*
- *Communicating the excitement of the global platform to the ACES community and linking it to stakeholders.*
- *Identifying opportunities and downlinking them to our faculty, students, and staff—and vice versa, uplinking faculty, students, and staff skills and aspirations to opportunities and challenges.*

- *Establishing and exploiting links to target institutions and individuals, including alumni, who can enrich our global experiences and enhance our presence worldwide.*
- *Nurturing the cross-cutting activities of AGC among College functions and foci, so as to ensure that the enterprise is broadly based and integrated.*
- *Enterprise management, including budgeting and fundraising as appropriate.*

### ***Scholarly Activities and Professional Development***

- *Building a consensus and commitment to prepare our students for life and work in an era of globalization.*
- *Coordinating faculty, student, and staff exchanges, so that the ACES community can experience the international arena firsthand and become acquainted with different cultures.*
- *Equipping the ACES community to deal with realities of a world market, the international mobility of knowledge and intellectual property, and the diversity of cultures and people.*
- *Communicating global opportunities, especially within the College.*
- *Building and maintaining linkages with key international institutions and individuals, including helping to assure that their visits to campus are well organized and meaningful.*
- *Assisting faculty, students, and staff in funding global activities.*
- *Developing partnerships with stakeholder groups that employ our students and interact with our faculty—and understand the importance of a global perspective.*
- *Ensuring that global engagement well done is appropriately acknowledged and rewarded.*

This list affirms the past and underscores our future aspirations with optimism, but it also begins the process of nudging us off into the unfamiliar. Now, I believe, is the time to get serious about this latter territory. Just exactly where haven't we been, and if we want to go there, which travel guides do we need to consult for the journey?

But first those affirmations—actually reaffirmations of the obvious: We recognize that at its core, AGC will retain a geographical orientation. We'll always be interested in places that you can't visit without a passport, and so we'll continue to facilitate foreign student exchanges and international faculty experiences. The aspirations, too, are straightforward and understandable. AGC seeks status and visibility in the College, up campus, and in the external world. We believe that regardless of its final form, our international dimension will engage us with stakeholder issues. And we want AGC to be an integrated College platform and not just a collection of activities isolated within our mission areas. So much for the familiar.

### **The Unfamiliar**

The whispers that entice us down the unfamiliar path might at first glance not seem novel at all. We've heard these breezy phrases often—*communicating global opportunities, commitment to prepare our students for life and work in an era of globalization, and*

*international mobility of knowledge.* If, and I repeat if, we are prepared to embrace globalization—if we are convinced that this invading force is not about to retreat from our ACES world, then the whispers are poised to change our way of doing business. Not just marginally, but fundamentally, and unsettlingly, and in (to use today’s vernacular) a paradigm busting fashion.

But why should an abstraction like “globalization” be so unsettling, not just for AGC but for ACES? (Now would be a good time for you to put this down and read the attached excerpt from Thomas Friedman’s *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. You’ll see business and politics words, but if you turn on your food and agriculture contextualization filter, the underlying concepts will pop right out.)

Now to repeat: Why should an abstraction like “globalization” be so unsettling, not just for AGC but for ACES?

*Because it is thoroughly unfamiliar to most of us.* Not long ago, the success of this College was geographically prescribed mostly. We proclaimed food and agriculture in Illinois and the Midwest to be our line of work mostly and we educated Illinois undergraduates for Illinois and Midwestern jobs mostly. Being international meant getting a passport and going places—or bringing students here, training them, and sending them back home, valuable activities all. But deep comprehension of international context was a fringe benefit that only some of us claimed. To others, such an understanding was just an afterthought—or no thought at all.

Now the potential employers of our students are demanding global skills. Technical competence and disciplinary knowledge within the context of food and agriculture in Illinois and the Midwest mostly, are taken for granted. And we have a dean who exclaims (but does not precisely explain) that the very survival of the College depends on our learning to become globally preeminent.

*Because it is intrusive and breaks rules.* Globalization is disrespectful of academic disciplines, scholarly conventions, and stakeholder traditions. It does not care if our mission areas are balanced or our departments survive. It demands a culture of change in an institution comfortable with tradition and consistency. Globalization is rapidly evolving, not very predictable, and controversial. It raises the notion of impertinent forces beyond our control, it triggers a whole set of conflicting ideological biases, and it forces us to think about the

entire planet, instead of our own geographical sphere of interest. Many of the participants in American agriculture would just like it to go away.

*Because it rearranges all the players.* Globalization has helped realign our concept of customer from the defined, familiar, and local (farmers, agricultural suppliers, and middlemen) in the direction of the undefined, unfamiliar, and distant (the assemblage of individuals and businesses that can be thought of as “consumers”). Members of this latter group, especially those living outside of the United States, do not necessarily turn first to ACES for knowledge about food, and if any of them do, their primary concerns may not relate much to our agriculture-in-Illinois comfort zone. To the extent that our core business is knowledge—that of creating and that of brokering, globalization has accelerated our loss of market share. We’re not only not the only players anymore, we don’t much understand the new players. And when we turn to our Land Grant peers for wisdom, we discover that globalization is in the process of cutting us off from the herd of more satisfied and insular institutions.

#### A Mandate?

One way to simplify this complexity and unfamiliarity is to link it to our aspirations in the form of a mandate: AGC ought to become the instrument that positions ACES, not just as the Dean suggests to survive in the global era, but to thrive in it. AGC, its planners and its participants, now have the opportunity to begin this defining. But what are our specific goals? What actions ought we to take? And how shall we measure success?

To help provoke this discussion, let me offer some proposals, none of which is at this point encumbered with a lot of explanatory verbiage. These are not “let’s vote whether or not to do it” suggestions. Think of them rather as “what could happen if we behave this way” ideas.

1. We set out collectively over the next 12 months to define explicitly the College’s aspirations for global preeminence. By this, I mean that we lay aside our traditional mission-oriented frames of reference and agree to identify goals, options for action, and metrics of achievement within the novel zone of global opportunity.
2. We provide a shared global immersion experience as part of the startup package for every new faculty member in the College. By this, I mean that we spend our money to take each cohort of new faculty someplace where they are confronted with the global context in which they are about to commence building their scholarly programs.

3. We change the frequency on our listening dial so as to deliberately engage those who feel most impacted by globalization. By this, I mean that we seek dialogue with those in the food system who feel most empowered and most threatened by globalization
4. We position ourselves to challenge the views of our traditional stakeholders on globalization—not for the sake of contentiousness, but to stimulate thoughtful understanding. By this, I mean that we acknowledge our responsibility to help guide the thinking of our clientele.
5. We build bridges to those on campus who are as acutely aware of globalizing trends as we are, but do not reside in ACES. By this, I mean that we acknowledge globalization of the food system to be but one facet of a much broader phenomenon, the “fast world” of Thomas Friedman.

In Friedman’s words.....

The Cold War world was like a broad plain, crisscrossed and divided by fences, walls, ditches and dead ends. It was impossible to go very far, or very fast, in that world without running into a Berlin Wall or an Iron Curtain or a Warsaw Pact or somebody's protective tariff or capital controls. And behind these fences and walls, countries could find a lot of places to hide and preserve their own unique forms of life, politics, economics and culture. They could be in the First World, the Second World or the Third World. They could have widely differing economic systems—a centrally planned communist economy, a welfare-state economy, a socialist economy or a free-market economy. And they could maintain widely different political systems—anything from democracy to dictatorship to enlightened authoritarianism to monarchy to totalitarianism. And differences could remain sharp, black and white even, because there were walls aplenty to protect them, and they were not easily penetrated.

What blew away all the walls were three fundamental changes—changes in how we communicate, how we invest and how we learn about the world. These changes were born and incubated during the Cold War and achieved a critical mass by the late 1980s, when they finally came together into a whirlwind strong enough to blow down all the walls of the Cold War system and enable the world to come together as a single, integrated, open plain. Today, that plain grows wider, faster and more open every day, as more walls get blown down and more countries get absorbed. And that's why today there is no more First World, Second World or Third World. There's now just the Fast World—the world of the wide-open plain—and the Slow World--the world of those who either fall by the wayside or choose to live away from the plain in some artificially walled-off valley of their own, because they find the Fast World to be too fast, too scary, too homogenizing or too demanding.