Project description

Global Classroom at Linnaeus University - connecting with the world

Summary

Today university students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff expect and are expected to participate in international and intercultural professional contexts. Present internationalisation activities at Lnu involve only a minority of university staff and students since the focus has so far been on physical mobility. However, digital media enable all to be involved in international professional networks and collaboration, both as a complement to physical mobility and when physical mobility is simply not practical or feasible. This type of internationalisation is known as virtual mobility (VM), a concept already widely spread within global higher education.

The primary aim of the project is to create a framework and organisation to establish international networking and collaboration as a key element in all courses at undergraduate and masters level at Lnu.

The project will run from 2015 to 2017.

1 Background

The globalized world needs well-educated people with knowledge about and an understanding of intercultural processes. Being part of this world and a partner with international enterprises in the region like IKEA, Volvo and Sigma Technology, Linnaeus University needs to ensure the participation of students and staff in internationally oriented education and research and development with a familiarity of intercultural behaviour. Therefore, internationalization is a fundamental strategy in Linnaeus University's corporate identity (Dnr: LNU 2011/439). The vision is to establish a creative and international knowledge environment promoting curiosity, creativity, companionship, and utility (A Journey into the future, 9). A range of internationalisation arrangements like exchange programmes for students, teachers, researchers or staff are already integrated in the Linnaeus University culture. Another example is the Linnaeus Summer University. Furthermore there are a number of courses and programmes with international collaboration. Seen from a student's perspective, familiarity with working in international groups benefits not only their work experience, it also contributes to developing soft skills and a good general educational background (Brandenburg, 16ff). To enhance the opportunities for students and staff to work in an international environment the university's

strategy for the next five years is to develop and deepen partnerships with prominent universities abroad, to develop the ability in students and members of staff to understand and act in a global context, to make use of international experience in students and members of staff and to provide students and members of staff with the opportunity to establish lasting contacts with foreign education and research environments (*A journey into the future*, 17).

However, there are still a number of students and colleagues who, for various reasons (eg. lack of financial resources or family matters) are unable to take part in these programmes (Brandenburg, 74f.).

At Linnaeus University there are at present approximately 31,000 (15,300 full time equivalent) students and 2,000 staff. Over the last five years only 390 Lnu students have participated each year for one or two semesters in exchange programmes. Most internationalisation activities focus on physical mobility; exchange studies, international programmes, projects, study visits, staff exchange etc. In addition to these efforts Lnu will develop a concept to strengthen internationalisation at home with the help of technology to enable international net-based collaboration. Internationalisation at home will contribute to greater equality of educational opportunities, sustainable development and a good working environment. It can lead to more rewarding physical mobility but also, more importantly, offer staff and students the opportunity to experience international collaboration without the costs and environmental impact of travel.

As a modern and international university it is essential that we further develop our strategies for internationalisation at all levels. All students need international experience as a vital merit for employability and a more fully developed internationalisation strategy will facilitate both staff and student recruitment.

2 Project aims and strategies

The Global Classroom (GC) concept at Lnu provides a basic infrastructure for university staff that enables collaboration with partner universities primarily focused on teaching. The project will result in an integration of GC activities into Lnu's mainstream activities and responsibility for continued development of GC will be assigned to the university administration (for example Office for external relations) in cooperation with the faculties.

2.1 Aims

The primary aim of the project is to create a framework and organisation to establish international networking and collaboration as a key element in all courses at undergraduate and masters level at Lnu.

Subsidiary aims:
1. to strengthen Lnu's ties with partner universities and create a springboard for new projects and cooperation

2. to increase awareness of diversity and multicultural perspectives
3. to disseminate and build upon existing good practice within Lnu

2.2 Outcomes (by end of 2017)

1. Five completed/ongoing pilot projects whose experience forms the basis of the framework/toolkit
2. A framework and toolkit for the internationalisation of courses and programmes
3. Establish a community of practice to facilitate sharing of experience and showcase good examples
4. Project evaluation and proposal for further development of internationalisation at Lnu

3 Project description

The concept of the project is based on the following principles:
1. International contacts are an integral part of LNU's corporate identity
2. International contacts for students are an integrated and a natural part of their education.
3. International contacts for students should be meaningful and as close to working life as possible
4. LNU enables and encourages the students to build and participate in international networks
5. The teacher's role is central in this process; as mentor, facilitator and role model

This project intends to build on existing internationalisation activities at Lnu and add the element of online collaboration to allow all students to get first-hand experience of international work, even if many will not be able to take part in physical mobility. This aim will naturally involve all teachers and to some extent also administrative and management staff. Using current tools and methods for online communication we can raise Lnu's international profile as well as helping to integrate internationalisation and intercultural communication into the everyday routines and activities of staff and students. The project aims to stimulate the development of virtual mobility by providing a toolkit of guidelines, quality criteria, process descriptions, recommendations of tools, methods and technology as well as working closely with faculty internationalisation staff to promote VM and supporting a number of pilot activities. Good practice both within Lnu and internationally will be highlighted and a number of key international partner universities will be identified and will be involved in a variety of pilot projects.The project group will systematically document ongoing internationalisation activities in every degree program. Through a self-assessment taxonomy, we will categorise activities and reveal areas where development needs exist. In a guided process of brainstorming workshops, concept development and implementation work the project team will work together with program directors to develop internationalisation (at home) and to integrate virtual mobility in all programme courses. Forming the workshop groups across faculty borders will gain new

ideas and strengthen collegial collaboration. The project group will focus on programme directors, who lead the educational development of their study programmes.

The central part of the project is to establish a framework for internationalisation that can be applied to all programmes. The project team will therefore guide programme directors through the following phases.

Phase 1 - Self evaluation All programme directors are asked to complete a self-assessment of their programme to capture present status and to highlight development needs	Vice-chancellor informs the deans of the faculties The members of GC working group work with programme directors The GC working group provide a self-assessment questionnaire
Phase 2 - Workshop 1 Modular workshops for programme directors/teachers (interfaculty groups) Discussion of development needs, brainstorming, exchange of ideas Task for workshop 2: Development of a concept for each particular programme	GC working group inspires, presents good examples Programme director: works together with teachers and student representative(s) in the programme
Phase 3 - Workshop 2 Conceptual work, presentation, adaptation (objectives, responsibilities, deadlines, follow-up, development) Task for Workshop 3: Plan implementation of new concept	GC and workshop group discuss the concept
Phase 4 - Implementation Implementation of the concept in the daily work with students	GC working group offers optional workshops for programme students on intercultural topics (in collaboration with the teachers) GC offers help in matching international partners GC helps with technical infrastructure and support
Phase 5 - Evaluation	GC evaluates each programme together with programme director and student representative Lessons learned are compiled in community database

This procedure will be adapted and adjusted as the project progresses.

4 Restrictions (What is not in the focus of the project)

The project does not aim at creating a specific technical solution or focus on any particular tools or services. Internationalisation can involve a wide range of tools, methods, services and environments both physical and online and the choice of those should be decided from case to case. This project will provide frameworks, templates, examples, guides and quality checklists to help teachers find the right solution for their courses.

The project provides a springboard for development but the real work lies in the hands of the faculties and departments. It is vital that teachers and students see this initiative as an opportunity to investigate new pedagogical methods, promote collaborative learning and increase student engagement in an international context.

5 Benefits

5.1 General benefits

1. Complement and enhance physical mobility of students and staff
2. First-hand experience of international cooperation
3. Deeper understanding of the use of technology in international cooperation
4. Develop language and intercultural skills
5. Develop wider contact networks
6. Enable international exchange for students/staff who are unable to travel on physical exchange

5.2 Benefits for students

1. Participation in courses with students of diverse international backgrounds
2. Participation in international cooperation is a clear merit for future employment (credits from other universities)
3. Deeper understanding of how other countries' education systems work

5.3 Benefits for teachers

1. Develop a personal learning network, community of interest with teachers from other countries and cultures
2. Enriched pedagogical development
3. Co-creation of learning resources

5.4 Benefits for the university

1. Greater international profile
2. Deeper cooperation with partner universities
3. Attract more students
4. Widen our curriculum by offering courses from partner universities

5. Share knowledge and resources
6. Exploit ICT-potential
7. Exploit teaching capacity, sharing expertise
8. Establish joint degrees
9. Collaboration in teaching and research
10. Internationalisation at home, more inclusive

6 Challenges and prerequisites

The most crucial success factor of the project is management commitment. It is essential that both university and faculty management understand and support the aims of the project and support staff who wish to develop international initiatives. Coordination with the office for external relations and faculty internationalisation coordinators are key channels for the project, especially in order to avoid clashing with existing internationalisation projects and initiatives. It is vital that central coordination for internationalisation is fully developed providing a clear point of contact for all staff.

The successful implementation of Global Classroom requires a change in culture for both staff and students and involves new tools and working methods. The benefits must be clearly demonstrated and competence development will be required for the project to have any significant effect. It will also involve developing linguistic, technical and pedagogical skills and although these fall outside the scope of this particular project they are important success factors.

An important motivational factor is that staff and students are recognised and rewarded for their skills and experience. Today there is increasing worldwide interest in the field of micro-credentials; certifications awarded often for soft skills (leadership, initiative, teamwork, linguistic ability, administrative skill etc) that are seldom recognized in traditional credentials. The growth of Open Badges is an example of this. Open Badges are digital certificates that can be awarded for proven skills and where the badge links to a full description of the award criteria, awarding body and contact information. It is a form of recognition of prior learning but is today used to reward staff or students for skills and achievements that do not merit formal qualifications. This type of system could be introduced at Lnu to recognize international experience, participation in projects or exchange programmes. These merits would be visible in the teacher's Lnu profile in the same way as publications are today and would give a more all-round view of the teacher's competence. It would also make it easier to find staff with the right skills for a new project.

Linked to the above is the establishment of a net-based community of practice that relies on staff registering their skills and areas of expertise and being willing to help colleagues. Without staff involvement and the development of a culture of sharing this concept will not be possible.

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·   Integration kit for Virtual Mobility: a guide for Institutional awareness (2014)
       http://vmcolab.eu/publications/awareness-kit/
·   Students' guide to virtual mobility (2013) http://vmcolab.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/studentsGuideA5_v06_FINAL.pdf