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# Internationalizing the curriculum in Taiwan: what department heads think

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There are many studies on internationalizing the curriculum, presenting different arguments and practices. One common thread in studies is to quote the typology suggested by Bremer and van der Wende (1995). However, such studies do not take the next step of checking what department heads think even though they play a key role in internationalizing the curriculum in their disciplines. The nature of the discipline causes different views about internationalized curricula. However, there are no explicit studies in the literature to describe the features of internationalized curricula for different disciplines. This paper presents the results and analysis of an online survey of department heads regarding the features of internationalized curricula they may consider to be essential, whether these views differ due to background variables, and similarities or differences in the importance of the features in 16 disciplines. The study, funded by the National Science Council, was conducted in the summer of 2007 and received 436 questionnaires for a 21.7% rate of return. The results show that over half of the respondents thought that only 8 out of 19 features of internationalized curricula were essential. The results indicate that respondents' views differed significantly by background variables on certain features of internationalized curricula. The portrait of the importance of the features of internationalized curricula across 16 disciplines creates an interesting result. Finally, the results of the study that extends the literature are discussed in the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** internationalizing the curriculum, department head, discipline, Taiwan

## Introduction

While policies are concerned about the internationalization of higher education, the issue of internationalizing the curriculum attracts less attention than other issues like student and staff mobility and trade-driven cross-border higher education. The heart of the internationalization of higher education remains its curriculum. Interestingly, a document by the University of Minnesota (2008) states that the number one reason why faculty should consider internationalizing their courses is that they owe it to their students is due to a deep belief that the students have much to gain from the internationalized curricula. Internationalizing the curriculum should move forward from the marginal and piecemeal activity. As Leask (2001) argues, internationalizing university curricula is a powerful and practical way of bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice. Many studies, among them, Bremer and van der Wende (1995), IDP (1995), Mestenhauser and Ellingboe (1998), Leask (2001), and Lunn (2008), have enhanced and broadened our understanding the issue and practices of internationalizing the curriculum in different parts of the world.

The demand for quality workforce provided by higher education has been intensified and strengthened in response to the impact and pressure of globalization and global professional mobility. However, employers complain that graduates are under qualified for the job in terms

of their professional knowledge, capacity, and attitudes. The challenge for higher education to provide qualified trained workforce with international competence (knowledge, skills and values) or qualified for global mobility remains huge. To address such a challenge, internationalizing the curriculum in higher education is key.

In Taiwan, internationalization of higher education is high on the agenda of higher education policies. The extent of internationalization of higher education has been included as one of the key indicators in the first extensive university evaluation. The evaluation results indicate that internationalization in the universities remains as an add-on activity though state-of-the-art internationalization appears diverse in terms of activities and programs. However, the importance of internationalizing the curriculum remains rhetoric in the vision of departments and institutions. It is time for universities and academics to think of how to create more spillover effects from those add-on activities. There is an urgent need for the faculty to consider how to prepare the students to live and work in the globalizing world through internationalizing the curriculum on campus. Furthermore, Taiwan should take the agenda for internationalizing the curriculum more seriously than the main host countries for international students.

In the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada, the presence of international students on campus is a valuable resource in offering students to experience the ‘global community’ within their universities. At the same time, the changing cultural profile of student population has raised educational issues and put challenges for academic staff. Under this circumstance, the issue of internationalizing the curriculum has attracted their attention, not only in exploring the rationales for internationalizing the curriculum, but also in taking the institutional and holistic approaches in internationalizing the curriculum. However, it is just a beginning in Taiwan to consider the importance of internationalizing the curriculum in response to the impact of the globalization. The rationale for internationalizing the curriculum in Taiwan is to ensure that local students have world vision rather than those of international students. Two reasons account for this. First, the expansion of higher education in Taiwan provide plenty and diverse opportunities for local students to remain home, without going abroad, for their advanced degrees. Second, there is lower population of international students and staff on campus. Then the questions of when and how local students could have an opportunity to experience the world in college life are obvious and urgent. The need to internationalize the curriculum is now being recognized and it is essential to ask what the internationalized curricula in Taiwan should focus on.

One common thread in studies on internationalizing the curriculum is to quote the typology of internationalized curricula suggested by Bremer and van der Wende (1995). For example, Leask (2001) takes the typology as a tool to develop defining characteristics of internationalized curricula to assist staff to see how to internationalize their courses. However, such studies do not take the next step of checking what department heads think even though they play a key role in curriculum planning in their disciplines. Furthermore, as the studies (e.g. Lambert, 1989; Groennings & Wiley, 1990 ) indicated, the nature of discipline would cause different views about the internationalized curricula. However, there are no explicit studies in the literature to describe the features of the internationalized curricula for different disciplines. Thus, the study aims to provide an empirical study in understanding the features of the internationalized curricula from department heads’ perspective and to describe the similarities and difference across disciplines. The main research questions are as follows:

1. What are the views of department heads regarding the features of internationalized

- curricula they may consider to be essential?
2. Do the views of department heads differ due to background variables?
  3. What are similarities and differences in the importance of the features of internationalized curricula across 16 disciplines?

## Method

The study, funded by the National Science Council, conducted an online survey of department heads regarding the features of internationalized curricula they may consider to be essential, whether these views differ due to background variables, and similarities or differences in the importance of the features across 16 disciplines. To investigate the department heads' views about the features of internationalized curricula, the study developed a questionnaire of 19 features of internationalized curricula based on the typology suggested by Bremer and van der Wende (1995) and IDP (1995). The internationalized curricula are:

1. Recognized by international accrediting bodies (A1)
2. Leading to an internationally recognized professional qualification (A2)
3. Leading to conferral of a joint or combined degree (A3)
4. Requiring students to complete studies in a foreign language or in areas such as intercultural communications or international studies (A4)
5. Learning about transnational knowledge (A5)
6. Training of cross-cultural communication and skills (A6)
7. Discussion of global issues and international affairs (A7)
8. Studies on international case studies (A8)
9. Studies of professional practices in other nations/ cultures (A9)
10. Application of other countries' experience to local issues (A10)
11. Having words such as global, international or transnational in course title (A11)
12. Degree programs especially designed for overseas students (A12)
13. Delivered in comparative approaches (A13)
14. Delivered in English or foreign languages (A14)
15. Having part of courses delivered by foreign scholars in departments/ schools (A15)
16. Having part of courses including internship delivered by another institution in another country (A16)
17. Having part of courses arranged to integrate local and international students in learning (A17)
18. Requiring students to use distance methods to obtain credits equivalent to their degree level (A18)
19. Delivered through the debate between the local and transnational issues (A19)

The survey consisted of two parts. The first part asked the department heads each of the 19 features of internationalized curricula that they may consider essential. The second part collected the heads' demographic information on 11 variables. They are: type of the university, discipline area (16 disciplines), gender, place of highest degree awarded, position, having an internationalization policy at the institutional level, having an internationalization policy at the departmental level, having a reward mechanism for internationalization at the institutional level, having a reward mechanism for internationalization at the departmental level, experience in using English as instruction medium, and experience in staying overseas (at least 1 year). The study was conducted in the summer of 2007. The researcher collected a total

of 436 out of the 2008 survey questionnaires distributed to department heads.  
The rate of return is 21.7%. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=436)

| Background                                                                         | Variables                                 | n   | %  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| Type of the University (ToU)                                                       | National                                  | 255 | 58 |
|                                                                                    | Private                                   | 181 | 42 |
| Disciplines (Dis)                                                                  | Earth science(Ear.)                       | 7   | 2  |
|                                                                                    | Education (Edu)                           | 30  | 7  |
|                                                                                    | Engineer (Engi.)                          | 86  | 20 |
|                                                                                    | Agriculture, fishery, and forestry (Agr.) | 24  | 6  |
|                                                                                    | Life science(Life)                        | 21  | 5  |
|                                                                                    | Law (Law)                                 | 4   | 1  |
|                                                                                    | Humanity (Hum.)                           | 44  | 11 |
|                                                                                    | Art (Art)                                 | 19  | 4  |
|                                                                                    | Business (Bus.)                           | 69  | 16 |
|                                                                                    | Mass media (Mass)                         | 3   | 1  |
|                                                                                    | Social science (SS)                       | 20  | 5  |
|                                                                                    | Architecture and design (Arch.)           | 15  | 3  |
|                                                                                    | Math, physics, and chemistry (MPC)        | 20  | 5  |
|                                                                                    | Information technology (IT)               | 27  | 6  |
|                                                                                    | Medicine and health (Med.)                | 40  | 9  |
|                                                                                    | Leisure & Sports (Lei.)                   | 6   | 1  |
| Gender (G)                                                                         | Male                                      | 327 | 75 |
|                                                                                    | Female                                    | 80  | 18 |
| Place of highest degree awarded (DA)                                               | Overseas                                  | 153 | 35 |
|                                                                                    | Local                                     | 254 | 58 |
| Position (P)                                                                       | Lecture                                   | 1   | 0  |
|                                                                                    | Assistant prof.                           | 22  | 5  |
|                                                                                    | Associate prof.                           | 150 | 34 |
|                                                                                    | Professor                                 | 234 | 53 |
| Internationalization policy at the institutional level (HP at Inst.)               | Yes                                       | 379 | 87 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 28  | 6  |
| Internationalization policy at the departmental level ((HP at Dep.)                | Yes                                       | 284 | 65 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 123 | 28 |
| Reward mechanism for internationalization at the institutional level (HR at Inst.) | Yes                                       | 335 | 77 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 72  | 17 |
| Reward mechanism for internationalization at the departmental level (HR at Dep.)   | Yes                                       | 140 | 32 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 267 | 61 |
| Experience in using English as instruction medium (Eng.)                           | Yes                                       | 149 | 34 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 258 | 59 |
| Experience in staying overseas (at least 1 year) (Os)                              | Yes                                       | 302 | 69 |
|                                                                                    | No                                        | 105 | 24 |

Statistical analysis: Statistical computations were performed using the SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to show the number and percentage of the respondents in considering the features of internationalized curricula to be essential. Chi-square test was

performed to examine possible differences in respondent' views due to their background variables. All findings discussed in the text are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Based on the results in individual disciplines, the researcher ranked their importance by the percentage that individual features obtained. According to their ranking, the researcher further grouped them into 3 different groups, highly important (ranking between 1 and 6), partly important (ranking between 7 and 13), and the least important (ranking between 14 and 19) features of internationalized curricula

## Results

Summary of the respondents' view on essential features of internationalized curriculum and their difference due to background variables is given in Table 2. According to Table 2, over half of the respondents thought that only 8 out of 19 features of internationalized curricula were essential. They are, in descending order, A9, A5, A4, A6, A10, A7, A8, and A15. Among them, A5 (learning about transnational knowledge) and A9 (studies of professional practices in other nations/ cultures) are highly considered to be essential by more than 80% of the respondents. On the contrary, the least essential features are A11 (having words such as global, international or transnational in course title) and A18 (requiring students to use distance methods to obtain credits equivalent to their degree level).

Table 2: Summary of respondents' view on essential features of internationalized curriculum and their difference (N=436)

| Features of internationalized curricula                                                                                                       | Essential |    | Significantly differ by background variables |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|----------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                               | n         | %  |                                              |
| Studies of professional practices in other nations/ cultures ( A9 )                                                                           | 363       | 83 | HP at Inst.                                  |
| Learning about transnational knowledge ( A5 )                                                                                                 | 348       | 80 | None                                         |
| Requiring students to complete studies in a foreign language or in areas such as intercultural communications or international studies ( A4 ) | 323       | 74 | ToU                                          |
| Training of cross-cultural communication and skills ( A6 )                                                                                    | 315       | 72 | HP at Inst.; HP at Dep.; HR at Dep.          |
| Application of other countries' experience to local issues ( A10 )                                                                            | 290       | 67 | None                                         |
| Discussion of global issues and international affairs ( A7 )                                                                                  | 254       | 58 | Dis.; HP at Inst.; HR at Dep.                |
| Studies on international case studies ( A8 )                                                                                                  | 254       | 58 | None                                         |
| Part of courses delivered by foreign scholars in departments/ schools ( A15 )                                                                 | 226       | 52 | HR at Inst.; HR at Dep.                      |
| Part of courses arranged to integrate local and international students in learning ( A17 )                                                    | 205       | 47 | Eng.                                         |
| Delivered in English or foreign languages ( A14 )                                                                                             | 200       | 46 | Eng.                                         |
| Part of courses including internship delivered by another institution in another country ( A16 )                                              | 183       | 42 | None                                         |
| Recognized by international accrediting bodies ( A1 )                                                                                         | 182       | 42 | ToU; Dis                                     |
| Degree programs especially designed for overseas students                                                                                     | 172       | 39 | G; HP at Dep.; HR at Inst.; HR at Dep.       |

| Features of internationalized curricula                                                               | Essential |    | Significantly differ by background variables |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|----------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                       | n         | %  |                                              |
| ( A12 )                                                                                               |           |    |                                              |
| Delivered through the debate between the local and transnational issues ( A19 )                       | 170       | 39 | Dis.                                         |
| Leading to conferral of a joint or combined degree ( A3 )                                             | 163       | 37 | ToU                                          |
| Leading to an internationally recognized professional qualification ( A2 )                            | 161       | 37 | ToU; Dis                                     |
| Delivered in comparative approaches ( A13 )                                                           | 161       | 37 | Dis.                                         |
| Requiring students to use distance methods to obtain credits equivalent to their degree level ( A18 ) | 100       | 23 | None                                         |
| Having words such as global, international or transnational in course title ( A11 )                   | 85        | 19 | Os                                           |

According to the chi-square tests, background variables that caused different views showed various results in individual features of internationalized curricula. Respondents' views differed significantly according to the type of the university (ToU) on 4 features ( $P<0.01$ ): A1, A2, A3 and A4. Respondents' views differed significantly by discipline (Dis.) on 5 features: A1, A2, A7, A13 and A19. Respondents' views differed significantly by gender (G.) only on A12. No significant difference in respondents' views by the place of degree awarded (DA) and their position (P) was found. Respondents' views differed significantly by having an internationalization policy at the institutional level (HP at Inst.) on 3 features: A6, A7 and A9. Respondents' views differed significantly by having an internationalization policy at the departmental level (HP at Dep.) on A6 and A12. Respondents' views differed significantly by having a reward mechanism for internationalization at the institutional level (HR at Inst.) on A12 and A15. Respondents' views differed significantly by having a reward mechanism for internationalization at the departmental level (HR at Dep.) on 4 features: A6, A7, A12 and A15. Respondents' views differed significantly by having experience in using English as instruction medium (Eng.) on A14 and A17. Respondents' views differed significantly by having experience in staying overseas (OS) only on A11. No differences were found on 5 features: A5, A8, A10, A16 and A18. In summary, the first 3 variables that caused more differences than others in respondents' views were the discipline, university type, and having a reward mechanism for internationalization at the departmental level. On the contrary, the least influential variables were respondents' degree and position.

The importance of the features of internationalized curricula across 16 disciplines is given in Table 3. The results showed fewer similarities but more differences in the importance of the features of internationalized curricula. On similarities, most disciplines tended to give same importance to certain features. For example, there were 5 features (A5, A9, A4, A6, A10) viewed highly important, 3 (A15, A16, A17) partly important, and 2 (A11, A18) the least important by most disciplines. A5 (learning about transnational knowledge) and A9 (studies of professional practices in other nations/cultures) were viewed highly important by all disciplines. On differences, while certain features might be viewed highly important by certain disciplines, they might also be viewed the least important. For example, A1 (recognized by international accrediting bodies) was viewed highly important by disciplines of engineering and information technology, but it was viewed the least important by 9 disciplines. The results also indicated that science disciplines tended to give higher importance to A1, A2 and A3 than other disciplines.

Table 3: The importance of the features of internationalized curricula across 16 disciplines

| Features                                                                                                                                      | Highly Important                      | Partly Important                                        | Least Important                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Recognized by international accrediting bodies ( A1 )                                                                                         | Engi.; IT                             | Agr.; Life; Mass; Arch.; Lei.                           | Ear.; Edu.; Law; Hum.; Art; Bus.; SS.; MPC; Med.       |
| Leading to an internationally recognized professional qualification ( A2 )                                                                    | IT                                    | Engi.; Bus.; Arch.; Lei.                                | Ear.; Edu.; Agr.; Life; Law; Hum.; Art; SS.; MPC; Med. |
| Leading to conferral of a joint or combined degree ( A3 )                                                                                     | MPC                                   | Edu.; Agr.; Life; Art; Arch.; IT; Med.; Lei.            | Ear.; Engi.; Law; Hum.; Bus.; Mass.; SS                |
| Requiring students to complete studies in a foreign language or in areas such as intercultural communications or international studies ( A4 ) | 15 disciplines                        | Bus.                                                    | none                                                   |
| Learning about transnational knowledge ( A5 )                                                                                                 | 16 disciplines                        | None                                                    | none                                                   |
| Training of cross-cultural communication and skills ( A6 )                                                                                    | 13 disciplines                        | Ear.; Mass; Med.                                        | none                                                   |
| Discussion of global issues and international affairs ( A7 )                                                                                  | Edu.; Agr.; Law; Bus.; Mass; SS; Med. | Ear.; Engi.; Life; Hum.; Art; Arch.; MPC; IT; Lei.      | none                                                   |
| Studies on international case studies ( A8 )                                                                                                  | Edu.; Law; Art; Bus.; Arch.; Med.     | Ear.; Engi.; Life; Agr.; Hum.; Mass; SS.; MPC; IT; Lei. | none                                                   |
| Studies of professional practices in other nations/ cultures ( A9 )                                                                           | 16 disciplines                        | None                                                    | none                                                   |
| Application of other countries' experience to local issues ( A10 )                                                                            | 13 disciplines                        | Mass; Arch.                                             | IT                                                     |
| Having words such as global, international or transnational in course title ( A11 )                                                           | none                                  | Mass; Lei.                                              | 14 disciplines                                         |
| Degree programs especially designed for overseas students ( A12 )                                                                             | Ear.; Law                             | Edu.; Engi.; Agr.; Bus.; SS                             | Ear.; Hum.; Art; Mass; Arch.; MPC; IT; Med.; Lei.      |
| Delivered in comparative approaches ( A13 )                                                                                                   | Law; Mass                             | Ear.; Edu.; Hum.; Art; Bus.; SS.; MPC; Med.             | Engi.; Agr.; Life; Arch.; IT; Lei.                     |
| Delivered in English or foreign languages ( A14 )                                                                                             | Ear.; Engi.; Law; MPC                 | Life; Agr.; Hum.; Art; Bus.; Mass; IT; Med.; Lei.       | Edu.; SS; Arch.                                        |
| Part of courses delivered by foreign scholars in departments/ schools ( A15 )                                                                 | Life; Hum.; Arch.                     | 12 disciplines                                          | Law                                                    |
| Part of courses including internship delivered by another institution in another country ( A16 )                                              | Law                                   | 12 disciplines                                          | Engi.; Bus.; IT                                        |

| Features                                                                                              | Highly Important      | Partly Important          | Least Important                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Part of courses arranged to integrate local and international students in learning ( A17 )            | Life; Law; IT         | 11 disciplines            | Ear.; Edu.                              |
| Requiring students to use distance methods to obtain credits equivalent to their degree level ( A18 ) | none                  | Ear.; Life; Mass          | 13 disciplines                          |
| Delivered through the debate between the local and transnational issues ( A19 )                       | Edu.; Law; Mass; Lei. | Ear.; Hum.; Art; SS; Med. | Engi.; Agr.; Life; Bus.; Arch.; MPC; IT |

Note: 'Ear.' for earth science; 'Edu.' for education; 'Engi.' for engineering; 'Agr.' for agriculture, fishery and forestry; 'Life' for life science; 'Law' for law; 'Hum.' for humanity; 'Art' for art; 'Bus.' for business; 'Mass' for mass media; 'SS' for social science; 'Arch.' for architecture and design; 'MPC' for math, physics, and chemistry; 'IT' for information technology and mechanic; 'Med.' for medicine and health ; 'Lei.' for leisure and sports

## Discussion

The study extends the literature in several ways. First, the results of the study bridge the gap between the literature and practice with respect to the perspectives on the essential features of the internationalized curricula. The study underwent an online survey of department heads across 16 disciplines in Taiwan. Though the curricula typology for internationalization is often adopted in relevant studies, there is no empirical study that explores how the stakeholders of higher education view it and whether their views differ due to their background. However, the results derived from department heads should be interpreted with caution as they represent only a part of the stakeholders' involvement in internationalizing the curriculum. Further study on student perspectives toward internationalizing the curriculum is required as students should be the foremost rationale for internationalizing the curriculum. In other words, the relevance of an internationalized curriculum should be linked to student's learning in college life.

Second, the study clearly indicates that some features are essential but some not to be included to be called internationalized curricula. It may have different interpretations in arguing what the internationalized curricula should be. The findings might enhance the commonalities once the issue regarding the features of internationalized curricula is discussed. In this study, features A5 (learning about transnational knowledge) and A9 (studies of professional practices in other nations/ cultures) are highly considered to be essential. On the contrary, features, like A11 (having words such as global, international or transnational in course title) and A18 (requiring students to use distance methods to obtain credits equivalent to their degree level), are viewed the least essential, if compared other features.

Third, the study clearly portrays the importance of the features of internationalized curricula across different disciplines. In the literature, the studies (e.g., Lambert, 1989; Groennings & Wiley, 1990 ) roughly mention the differences regarding the internationalized curricula between nature sciences and social sciences. The study clearly indicates some of the features for certain disciplines that are highly important may not be the same for other disciplines.

Finally, the study raises the basic question for research on internationalizing the curricula. A further question is which features of the internationalized curricula are fit for what type of university? In proposing the typology or features of internationalized curricula, it is also

important to ask for whom and for what disciplines? Interestingly, background variables such as having policy and reward mechanism at the institutional and departmental levels that result in different views are not mentioned in the past literature. The results of the study suggest that we should take the views of stakeholders of higher education into account while adopting the typology suggested by Bremer and van der Wende (1995), or characteristics of internationalized curricula developed by the IDP (1995). This step would enhance the possibility to form a consensus on internationalizing the curriculum.

## Conclusions

In the literature, studies have moved forward to look into innovative practices of internationalizing the curriculum on campus and in classes in different parts of the world. There is still a long way to go to internationalize the curriculum in Taiwan, but the need for it is beginning to be recognized. While the concept of internationalizing the curriculum in concrete terms remains ill-defined, asking what internationalized curricula would look like becomes essential for internationalizing the curriculum. This is the first study to explore how department heads view internationalized curricula, whether their views differ due to their background, and what similarities and difference in the importance of the features of internationalized curricula across 16 disciplines are. This action leads to the engagement of faculty members in various disciplines in thinking about and discussing the issue of internationalizing the curriculum.

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