

College of Charleston

Guidelines for Developing and Evaluating International Academic Partnerships & Exchanges

Purpose

As the College of Charleston (the “College”) strives to “establish an integrated, interdisciplinary, experiential liberal arts core that equips every student to succeed academically and professionally in a globally connected world” as articulated in its strategic plan, the provision of valuable educational opportunities around the world is vital to its mission. Accordingly, faculty and staff should follow these guidelines when seeking to initiate collaborative academic activities or partnerships with foreign universities and when evaluating current programs or agreements of this nature.

General Considerations

Developing and sustaining international partnerships require substantial resources and time commitments. Additionally, all related academic agreements must conform to applicable and current Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) at the time of execution. To help ensure success, all major stakeholders necessary for the successful administration of such an agreement must be involved from the beginning. Many partnerships arise out of existing faculty connections, but it is essential for a partnership to go beyond the individual faculty research/interest while addressing the College’s strategic plan and the program goals and strategic vision of the home school. Faculty members with limited exchange partnership experience should consult with College faculty or staff who have worked with successful international exchanges. The College’s Center for International Education (CIE) will guide interested faculty members throughout this process. Partnerships may be developed by faculty in coordination with the department chair/program director(s) and school dean(s), or by CIE staff if the exchange would cover multiple academic disciplines. In these cases, CIE staff would ask a minimum of two departments per school or between schools, excluding the School of Education, Health and Human Performance, to review the academic fit and course offerings. When a potential partner institution does offer courses that fall within the School of Education, Health and Human Performance, the appropriate departments will be asked to review.

Types of Academic Agreements

Each international academic agreement is unique and must be reviewed separately based on the needs and expectations of the College and the abroad institution. Proposed agreements that are ultimately approved are formalized in writing in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) via the process outlined herein.

Generally, many academic exchanges involve one or more of the following:

- Student exchange agreement based on a one-on-one model
- Student and faculty/staff exchange
- Collaborative Research partnership
- Collaborative teaching agreement
- Degree completion/articulation, student transfer agreements
- Joint/dual degree program

Preliminary considerations

Partnerships are effective only when they achieve the outcomes as outlined in an MOU, hence the most important task in developing effective international partnerships is finding the best match for the College of Charleston. To ascertain partnership possibilities and interest, faculty members interested in proposing a new exchange agreement will complete an online form that outlines the necessary information to review an exchange partnership. Upon receiving the completed form, CIE staff will arrange a meeting with the faculty member and the relevant chair(s) and school dean(s). Prior to the meeting, the proposal should be discussed within the academic unit and across units within the school, or across schools as pertinent.

It should be noted that economic disparity could challenge meaningful international partnerships: an exchange with a university in a developing country may not be feasible if the prospective partner university cannot provide its students support for housing and airfare; alternatively the potential partner university may be in a location where travel and living expenses are prohibitive. These situations should be evaluated as the details of a potential partnership are developed.

Regardless of the nature of collaboration, answers to the following considerations must be submitted to the CIE, via the [online form](#), prior to discussions of an MOU:

1. Is the partner university verifiably accredited by an appropriate third-party agency/organization and the country's equivalent to Ministry of Education? What is the university's academic reputation (including any global rankings)?

2. Does the College and the potential partner institution have shared expectations and desire similar outcomes for students and faculty?
3. Does the partner university currently have similar agreements with other U.S. universities?
4. Is there potential for developing multidisciplinary initiatives with the partner institution?
5. How will the proposed initiative be sustained by a support system existing within the CofC department(s)/school(s)?
6. How does this new proposal align with the College's and School's/Schools' current Strategic Plans?
7. What is the plan to recruit students and/or faculty for this new initiative at the College and at the partner university?
8. Does the new initiative duplicate or complement any existing ones and how?
9. What are the current political and economic conditions in the country, region, and city where the partner is located?
10. Do the partner university's course offerings and educational mission appropriately complement the College? Do they have an appropriate number of courses in English?
11. How do the academic calendars between the two institutions align?
12. How will students from the College register and enroll in courses? Are there restrictions on what courses they can take?
13. Will students enroll in courses along with the partner university's degree-seeking students, or is there a separate program for international students?
14. Would there be opportunities for virtual academic collaborations such as guest lectures or co-taught courses?
15. What support is provided once students are accepted? Does the university provide an orientation upon arrival? How does the university support students during their semester abroad?
16. Are medical and mental health services readily available for students? Does the university have an emergency plan for exchange students?
17. Can students participate in student clubs and organizations? Is there a peer mentor/buddy program?
18. Is the university able to support students with learning or physical disabilities?
19. Does the university provide housing? If not, do they arrange or provide housing resources? Can students confirm their housing before arrival?
20. Are students from the partner university sufficiently prepared in English language skills to study in the U.S.? Can they meet the financial documentation requirement of approximately \$10,000 USD per semester in liquid funds (checking/savings/money market accounts)?

Approval Process

Once the online form has been received by the CIE, a meeting will be scheduled with the CIE staff, the proposing faculty member(s), department chair(s)/program director(s), and dean(s) to review the proposal. If there is consensus to move forward, the chair(s)/director(s) and dean(s) will need to email approval to CIE. Following these discussions, if there is universal support, site visits may be considered to the prospective university by a small delegation of relevant faculty and a representative of the CIE (contingent upon available funding).

The CIE will evaluate and forward the proposal to the Provost with its recommendation. In some cases, a small committee may be convened to assist in the evaluation. **NOTE: Initiating programs or courses offered through contractual agreements or consortium, or entering into a contract with an entity not certified to participate in USDOE Title IV programs requires 6-month prior notification to SACSCOC and/or prior SACSCOC approval for implementation.** The MOU will then be reviewed by the College's MOU Review Committee, a process that generally takes 2-3 weeks. This review may prompt questions that will need to be addressed by the proposer, with the department chair's and dean's knowledge, before a final version can be forwarded to the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) for final review. Once OLA finishes its review, the CIE will obtain the necessary signatures from the College's and partner institution's officials and other parties, as appropriate [some universities will hold an agreement signing ceremony in order to highlight the importance and value the institutions place on the cooperation; in such cases, participation from top administration may be arranged]. A set of original signed agreements will be sent to the partner institution with copies to the College's respective departments/schools.

In certain cases, the CIE may initiate a university-wide exchange partnership to fill a gap in the current offerings available to students. These universities would be selected, in part, due to their wide range of course offerings and thus not require specific departmental advocacy. The CIE will consult with various academic departments (no less than five) about the academic fit between institutions, namely some of the most popular transfer subject areas including but not limited to Biology, Business, English, History, Political Science, and Psychology. If there are other areas of unique or underrepresented subject areas, those academic departments will be consulted as well (e.g. Education or Engineering). These proposals will still be reviewed by the Provost, MOU Review Committee and OLA.

Renewal of Existing MOUs

Prior to the expiration of an existing MOU, the CIE will contact the appropriate department/schools with which the MOU was initiated to inquire if there is an interest in

renewing the agreement. CIE will work with all parties involved to determine the level of mutual interest in renewing the agreement. Primary areas that will be considered in evaluating renewal will include:

- The level of participation in the program over the period of the MOU
- Whether there are any imbalances in participation
- Whether continuation of the MOU is financially feasible or desirable for the College
- Quality of participation and responsiveness by the designated authorities at the international partner institution
- The possible impact that other program or expansion opportunities might have on the MOU

Additionally, the CIE has developed a review matrix that will be used to evaluate the strength of the partnership.

The renewal of exchange agreements *may* require the review of the College of Charleston's MOU Review Committee. This determination is done in consultation with Academic Affairs. OLA will be the last step of approval, after which time, CIE will coordinate the renewal of the MOU by contacting the respective institution and securing their review and agreement to sign a new MOU.

Termination of Existing MOUs

Interest in terminating an existing MOU should be communicated to CIE along with the justifications. CIE may also initiate termination of an MOU. The decision to terminate an MOU may be made by CIE upon consultation with the Provost's Office and the Office of Legal Affairs; the relevant Schools/departments impacted by potential termination will be notified.