

Administrators and Communicators— A Team in International Programs

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Cooperation at the Campus Level

When face to face with any communication task, one of my first questions is always "What are we trying to do?" That's the big E in the SMRCE model, and it's a good point to start thinking.

Early on, the conference planning group defined one important task where communicators and administrators need to cooperate: The job of helping audiences throughout the state understand how and why their land-grant college of agriculture is involved in international agriculture in the first place and in the specific overseas projects that are part of the college's effort.

Finally, one communicator asked what the rest of us were wondering: Do we really want to? And then the good discussion followed.

Delbert T. Dahl, head of agricultural communications at the University of Illinois, gave the first of these three panel presentations on the subject of administrators and communicators in overseas projects. Darl E. Snyder, director of international development at the University of Georgia, gave the second; and Edwin B. Oyer, director of international agricultural programs at Cornell University, gave the third.

Yes, we do want our constituents throughout the state aware of what we're doing and why. We'll get some flack if what we say looks like it will put the lid on soybean prices. Could we tell the story—just a little bit? Once you tell it, a story seeks its own level and generates stories of its own.

And as these remarks circled the room, two things became evident. We do want our stories told, but they require some careful telling. And the only way we're going to successfully go about this is through a lot of shared thinking and cooperation between the communicators and administrators—and the faculty—involved.

Despite the problems that may emerge, there was general consensus that making residents of our states aware of our international efforts is a valid task that needs to be done.

Then came an even-closer-to-home task: reporting our work and accomplishments to our colleagues and administrative audiences right on our own campus. Most of us agreed that such reporting gets done on a hit-or-miss basis, and that having a systematized method would be a vast improvement. And most of us agreed that reporting on campus too often focuses on who went where: Intent and impact stories would probably present our work in a more proper light and consequently avoid the “round-the-world” trip syndrome. But above all, some cooperation and coordination is needed to assure that such stories get told in a timely manner in media that are effective in reaching the campus audiences.

A third task defined was that of developing on-campus teaching and training programs for foreign participants. Land-grant colleges have long been called on to provide such training. But in the past, many of the requests have centered on the technical agricultural areas: seed production, fertilizers, plant breeding, and animal health, for example.

More recently, however, many colleges have received requests asking for at least part of the program requests ask specifically for training in communications. I know Wisconsin, Michigan, Cornell, Illinois, and many others have considerable involvement.

Communications is a 14-letter word. But it seems bigger when you start guessing what it means. Are they looking for mass media help? Do we teach them news style and radio production? Are they really interested in face-to-face communications? Should we be teaching public presentations and visualization of messages? Is there electricity at their teaching location? If not, scrap the video, the slides, and the over-

heads, and welcome to U.S. extension—1940 vintage. The flip chart and flannel boards have risen again.

Somewhere in the process of saying "Yes, we can do it," communicators and administrators need to share some thinking and gather some information to assure that the teaching on communications is really on target to meet the needs of the foreign participants. And if at all possible, some efforts should be planned to determine whether that teaching or training ever gets put to use when the participants return home.

There is one final task that involves communicators, and I'm not certain how well it gets done. That task is this: Developing on-campus teaching and training programs to prepare domestic students to work in the international arena.

The need for such programs seems to increase as we see the trend to include more extension and communications efforts in the international involvement of U.S. colleges. I don't know about your institutions, but much of our early involvement rested almost entirely with our research faculty. Only in recent years have we seen a greater level of extension and communicator involvement as concepts such as total farming systems have made their debut.

That's healthy. But as I look at the shining faces under the mortar-boards at graduation time, I wonder how ready they are to step into the international arena and make the kinds of contributions needed.

Our program at Illinois has enough flexibility in it that we can provide some courses that add an international dimension to an undergraduate's program. I'm certain that our involvement in PACE and INTERPAKS influenced the content of some courses. But none of the alternatives we currently offer focuses totally on international communications. I don't know what your institutions offer, but we don't have such courses, and without the cooperation of our international administrators, I doubt that we will have in the near future.

The prospect is exciting. I think we would have students interested.

Each of these four tasks is worth doing. More than that, they all need to be done. I have a feeling that all of us are nibbling away at them here and there. Some institutions are probably doing very well.

But if we are going to be serious about that kind of work, it seems to me that two things are greatly needed.

1. Cooperation between communicators and administrators is essential. That goes without saying.
2. More important in my thinking is support to do the job. Our office at Illinois has had a fair amount of international involvement through the years dating back to the Jordan project that started in 1963. Those of us involved through the years have all had extension, experiment station or teaching appointments. When we've had international involvement—at home or overseas—we've also had guilt complexes because we weren't doing our "real" jobs.

Now we all know that isn't true. But avoiding that kind of mentality isn't easy, and the whispers of guilt tend to keep you from aggressively seeking ways to do all that can be done. You tend to do what comes along and not look for ways to plan long-term involvement.

Maybe that's a problem not typical of most communicators interested and concerned about the international scene. But as we take the broad look, I think we should spend some time considering what needs to be done to make communicators feel that their leadership and involvement in international efforts is not only appreciated but also legitimate.

Cooperation at a National Level

The title of our presentation "Administrators and Communicators—A Team in International Programs" would imply the existence of an issue. Because I have already come to my conclusion on the issue, I will state my bias at the outset. An international development programs's potential is diminished if it does not include an administrator-communicator alliance. The alliance forms an axis—an axis that helps balance international program objectives.

I want briefly to describe the importance of this union, first as it might relate to inter-university communications; second, in reaching congressional representation; and third, how it can help us as administrators gain access to the mass media. All are essential ends for our international programs.

Regarding inter-university cooperation and communications, I feel that we administrators haven't done a very good job. I attribute this to the fact that we all too often deal with each other as competitors rather than as colleagues. I suggest as a possible solution to this situation might result if we could be guided in our relations by acknowledgement of the common goal of international programs: to improve human life on Earth. This should help check, I hope, tendencies toward aggrandizement of institutions.

Let's consider some problems that we administrators have when we must stand alone in our efforts to communicate.

Many universities publish newsletters reporting their numerous international activities and involvements. I am afraid these are prepared by administrators without the assistance of communicators who, as a rule, are more knowledgeable of communication techniques. I mean that to include this psychology as well as punctuation, paragraphs, and parentheses!

Furthermore, as is often the case, the material is written for in-house or local consumption—in some cases not even with a statewide audience in mind, let alone a national constituency.

I am confronted by this problem myself. For example, we have been trying to get the first issue of a newsletter ready for press for a longer time than I would care to recount. Our problem, as is likely yours, is that most of us don't have adequate access to professional communicators and editors.

And while I'm on the subject of the university and communications, I want to state that universities, in my opinion, could do a better job telling their story not only to each other but to USAID.

Many people in USAID and OICD don't know the strengths and capabilities of our universities. Thus, we often come up short in getting contracts. Instead, many contracts are signed with consulting firms and private volunteer organizations. USAID, too, could do a better job of communicating its needs to us.

All of this results in fragmentation, confusion, and a lowered level of effectiveness in our international efforts.

Now the second item: Reaching Congressional representation. In this area we have really fallen down in building a constituency. This is unfortunate, because it's an area that has no built-in constituency.

It is apparent that administrators of federal agencies involved in the development and implementation of international programs are not very effective in getting their message to Congress. If they were, surely there would be more support at that level. Most members of Congress from my state of Georgia do not support foreign-aid bills.

USAID has recognized the need for more effective communications at these levels, and funds are being made available to launch pilot programs to help build state constituencies.

James Cowan, Director of International Studies and Programs for the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, and some of his colleagues in other associations located here in Washington, have written a pilot proposal to obtain USAID funds to build support for international programs in Utah, Rhode Island, Georgia, and Michigan.

What I'm talking about is our need for more effective communications, and that means a greater and more effective use of communicators. As an administrator of international programs. I would benefit by double-teaming with those knowledgeable in this field.

Finally, let me address the matter of gaining access to the mass media. In the past couple of years, our program has benefited from the assistance of communications department. The Department of Agricultural Communications has enabled us to bring information about our international programs to both local and international audiences.

For example, I have recently returned from Upper Volta [now Bourkina Fasso] where I spent two weeks reviewing our USAID-funded agriculture and human resources development project. I was accompanied by Jack Reeves, who is with the University of Georgia's Division of Agricultural Communications. Although by one definition Jack might be called a "communicator," I think he is better described as a journalist and a public relations person.

In short, the president of the University of Georgia recognized the benefits of communications and good public relations!

Why? Because it was recognized by the president that a communicator's skills can well serve the university's international development objectives.

But this did not come about overnight or on an administrative whim. A foundation for this confidence has been

developed over time which convinced university administrators that communicating is important to the institution's interests.

For example, through the Department of Agricultural Communication's efforts, accounts of the university's international development programs have been highlighted on the Voice of America. While in Upper Volta, two members of the U.S. Embassy told me they had only the day before heard me interviewed on the Voice. Jack Reeves and I were interviewed by a VOA correspondent this week about our latest trip to Africa.

Not limiting ourselves in our "national" communications, we have a similar alliance with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The Summer 1984 Edition of USAID's "Horizons" magazine will feature an article written by Jack on the University of Georgia's international development program in Upper Volta.

Mind you, these things did not spontaneously happen. They result from a well-formed alliance between administration and communication.

One other matter on Upper Volta. While we were in that country, we were guests at a reception where the minister of higher education and scientific research walked in listening to himself over the Voice of America. The interview had been arranged by us when he visited our campus last month.

The visits of both the minister and the Upper Volta Ambassador to the United States received extensive coverage in the Athens press and on radio. The mayor of Athens in one photo was shown presenting the Ambassador with the key to the city. An orchestrated media event? Yes, but everybody won!

Each of us could, no doubt, offer similar and more extensive examples. However, I will conclude with this message. Administrators, welcome the communicator. The alliance can work at our behest. Let's seize the wave of the future, and ride upon its crest.

Benefits of Such Cooperation in Overseas Projects

Communication support

By the time an overseas project is negotiated and approved, a mound of paper describing the project location, objectives, host institution, etc., will have been generated and responded to by another mound of paper describing the

outstanding capabilities of the U.S. university which is proposing to assist in the accomplishment of the desired objectives.

At this point, there is already adequate information available for the preparation of a brochure describing the project, cooperating institutions, personnel, etc. But how often do we see brochures or hear news stories about such projects? Rather seldom, I fear, in view of the large number of such projects which are on the books at present. Is that anyone's fault? Probably not, but it indicates the almost ubiquitous lack of the desired symbiotic relation between administrators and communicators in a functional, project-oriented mode. A simple brochure can do wonders for both the administrator and the communicator.

But that is only the beginning. Additional opportunities are ever present for more effective communication within and among the cooperating institutions and project personnel. Reporting is not a popular task but presents a historical record not only of the project implementation, but also of the development of the cooperating institutions. These records, in turn, are valuable in the negotiation of extensions of contracts, addition of desired components, and in composing the termination report. Of course, each project will have its individual opportunities and requirements, but effective communication can only smooth the project's implementation.

Expanding the constituency

I do not know how large an overseas project must be to justify the time of a fulltime communications expert. The current Title XII Collaborative Research Support Projects have fulltime communicators attached to them and the results are already apparent. If the U.S. university community is to maintain both its interest and mandate for activities overseas, we need to do more than we have to date to inform a number of constituencies of not only our programs and successes but also our problems and their potential solutions.

A congressman recently informed Secretary of State Schultz that there was no foreign assistance constituency in the U.S. Congress. In an increasingly interdependent world, a comment like that is shocking—especially from a legislator of a superpower nation. But on reflection, one can ask why there would be a foreign assistance constituency in Congress? Constituencies usually represent special interests and our present inadequate communication of what we as a

nation are contributing to the development of Third World countries through the individual projects we are involved in certainly does nothing to build such a constituency. That is only one of the many roles for the communicator in on-going projects.

The Farming Systems Support Project that is being managed by the University of Florida and that involves many of our land-grant universities is an example of effective use of communication skills in informing the university community of activities under way through a newsletter and other mechanisms. But the audience needs to be enlarged so we do not only preach to those already converted!

Strengthening skills abroad

While increasing the involvement of communicators in the traditional production, development, and institution-building projects abroad is a critical need, that of developing more projects to improve communication skills in those institutions is perhaps an even greater need. Few colleges and universities abroad have as yet established a faculty and curriculum in the broad area of communication arts, let alone specialization in the several media skills. The pioneering efforts of the late Hadley Read in the area of need are to be applauded. But while the teaching of communication skills must be a basic ingredient, much more is needed and needed soon.

My friend and colleague Bill Ward came to Indonesia three times during my tenure there and accomplished a miracle each time. First he prepared a brochure describing the agricultural research and development agency of the country. Next he assisted in the initiation of a journal for publication of research and development reviews and results. Finally, he edited and prepared the layout for a 5-year research report. The miracles were evident in the short period of time he accomplished these tasks and the high quality product he left behind in such a short time.

While doing these tasks willingly and gladly, Bill's goal for the agency was to develop an information system for the entire organization. This would have been no small task but it does demonstrate both the need and potential for leadership in communications project in developing countries. The need is great, the qualified laborers are few. It is a challenge to our imagination and innovation to find ways to improve the interaction between administrators and communicators.