

# Comprehensive Internationalization & Career Readiness at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University

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*Author Notes*



**Comprehensive Resource Analysis:** The team examined extensive materials, including ACE's Internationalization in Action series, research on education abroad and undergraduate experience, resources on Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), and frameworks for intercultural learning assessment.

**Strategic Mapping Activities:** Using tools such as the Systems Scribing Canvas, the team identified institutional strengths, gaps, relationships among programs, and growth opportunities.

**Campus Consultations:** ACE staff conducted site visits and met with various campus stakeholders to gather feedback and provide tailored guidance.

## Building on Historic Strengths

CSB/SJU's international engagement stems from deep historical roots in the Benedictine tradition of global service. The institutions' international connections include:

- **The Bahamas:** The largest international student population, resulting from Benedictine educational initiatives that helped students complete their degrees when higher education options were limited in their home country
- **China and Hong Kong:** Established through early Benedictine missionary work, now a strong community of students and alumni
- **Japan:** A 30-year partnership initiated through cultural exchange
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Connections built through bringing Bosnian students to study in the U.S.
- **Additional partnerships:** In Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Vietnam, Ethiopia, South Korea, and Sri Lanka

This diverse international student body creates natural opportunities for intercultural learning and has made global engagement central to institutional identity—even as COVID-19 temporarily disrupted participation rates, causing study abroad numbers to drop from over 50% to just 14% during the pandemic's peak.

## Four Pillars of Recommendations

Through the ACE process, the steering committee developed four major recommendation areas:

### 1. Commit to Global Engagement in Curriculum and Co-Curriculum

#### Key initiatives:

- Expand courses with "GL" (Global Learning) designation, signaling significant global engagement components.
- Support student clubs and organizations with international connections

- Increase international travel programs, particularly "embedded programs" that combine two months of on-campus coursework with two weeks of international experience
- Develop faculty capacity and support for leading students abroad
- Implement more COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) courses

**The challenge:** Faculty course redesign takes time and support. Creating actual curricular change requires investment in faculty development and recognition of this work in promotion and tenure processes.

## 2. Strengthen International Student Support Structures

### Key initiatives:

- Provide holiday housing, food, and activities when the campus closes for breaks
- Improve transportation access for international students
- Create comprehensive support systems that recognize the unique needs of students far from home

**The rationale:** International students enrich campus culture and provide natural opportunities for domestic students to develop intercultural competencies. Supporting their success benefits the entire campus community.

## 3. Expand Study Abroad Access

### Key initiatives:

- Reduce program fees to increase accessibility for all students, regardless of income
- Develop more short-term program options to accommodate students with financial constraints, academic schedules, or family obligations.
- Explore domestic study-away opportunities that provide intercultural experiences within the United States.

**The goal:** Make global engagement accessible to every student, not just those with financial means or traditional academic trajectories.

## 4. Establish Clear Leadership and Vision

### Key initiatives:

- Create cross-campus representation in internationalization governance
- Define internal leadership structures with authority to implement strategic recommendations
- Establish accountability measures for achieving internationalization metrics
- Secure sustained funding for initiatives

**The reality:** Without clear leadership and institutional commitment, even the best strategic plans remain aspirational rather than operational.

# The True North Journey: Linking Internationalization to Career Readiness

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of CSB/SJU's approach is the *True North Journey*, a four-year framework that explicitly connects international experiences to career development. The four years are: CHART, TEST, BUILD, LAUNCH

## Year 1: CHART (Building Foundations)

**Focus:** Exploration and introduction

### Key questions:

- How do we introduce first-year students to connections between study abroad and career development?
- What early career exploration activities abroad would benefit students still exploring majors?
- How do we make study abroad feel accessible and relevant to career goals from day one?
- What foundational skills (budgeting, independence, communication) do first-years need before going abroad?

**Approach:** Students explore their strengths, values, and aspirations, beginning to discover who they are and what they want from their education.

## Year 2: TEST (Exploration & Planning)

**Focus:** Considering possibilities and building confidence

### Key questions:

- How can sophomores use study abroad to explore career interests and test potential majors?
- What pre-departure career readiness activities help students set professional goals for their time abroad?
- How do we help sophomores identify programs that align with emerging career interests?
- What networking or skill-building activities abroad work best for students still in exploration mode?
- How can sophomores document their experiences for future career use?

**Approach:** Students consider bold ideas, push at the edges of what's possible, and grow their confidence through experimentation.

## Year 3: BUILD (Professional Development)

**Focus:** Skill development and professional networking

### Key questions:

- How can juniors leverage study abroad for internships, research, or professional experiences abroad?
- What during-program activities help juniors build international professional networks?
- How do we integrate study abroad with junior-year internship/co-op experiences?
- What career coaching should juniors receive while abroad to maximize learning?
- How can juniors prepare to articulate their abroad experience in interviews and on resumes?
- What partnerships with international employers or alumni could create opportunities?

**Approach:** Students round out their skills, expand their reach, and lead the way forward with clarity about their professional direction.

## Year 4: LAUNCH (Integration)

**Focus:** Translation and transition to post-graduate life

### Key questions:

- How do we help seniors translate their abroad experience into compelling career narratives?
- What support do seniors need to leverage international experiences in job searches and graduate school applications?
- How can we create senior capstone projects or presentations that showcase global competencies to employers?
- What opportunities exist for seniors to mentor younger students about study abroad and careers?
- How do we track career outcomes for study abroad alumni to demonstrate program value?
- What partnerships with employers help them understand the value of study abroad experience?

**Approach:** Students take significant steps toward transitioning into post-graduate life, ready to launch into their next chapter.

## The Skills Employers Value

A critical component of linking internationalization to career readiness is articulating the specific competencies that international experiences develop. Research shows employers prioritize skills that study abroad naturally cultivates:

- **Adaptability and flexibility:** Navigating new environments and unexpected challenges
- **Resilience:** Overcoming obstacles and recovering from setbacks
- **Problem-solving and critical thinking:** Finding creative solutions in unfamiliar contexts
- **Cross-cultural communication:** Working effectively across cultural differences

- **Teamwork and collaboration:** Building relationships with diverse peers
- **Career and self-development:** Understanding personal strengths and professional interests
- **Agility:** Responding quickly to changing circumstances
- **Curiosity and lifelong learning:** Maintaining openness to new ideas and experiences
- **Motivation and self-awareness:** Understanding what drives personal and professional growth

The challenge for institutions isn't developing these skills; study abroad naturally does that, but instead helping students recognize, articulate, and document their development for future employers.

## From Strategic Plan to Implementation

The ACE process culminated in a comprehensive report with a clear message: *The Future is NOW*. The steering committee recognized that moving from planning to implementation requires:

- **Institutional buy-in:** Leadership must prioritize internationalization, not just in mission statements but in resource allocation and strategic decision-making.
- **Sustainable funding:** Reducing barriers to study abroad, supporting international students, and developing faculty capacity all require financial investment.
- **Cross-campus collaboration:** Internationalization can't be siloed in a single office; it requires partnership across academic affairs, student life, career services, and other areas.
- **Assessment and accountability:** Institutions must define success metrics and track progress toward goals.
- **Continuous improvement:** The work of internationalization is never complete; institutions must remain responsive to changing student needs and global circumstances.

## A Model for Liberal Arts Colleges

CSB/SJU's experience offers valuable lessons for other liberal arts institutions seeking to strengthen their international engagement:

**Start with your strengths:** Build on existing international partnerships and institutional history rather than creating programs from scratch.

**Think beyond mobility:** While studying abroad is important, comprehensive internationalization includes curriculum, campus climate, and support for international students.

**Make explicit connections:** Don't assume students will automatically translate international experiences into career skills; create structured opportunities for reflection and articulation.

**Remove barriers:** If global engagement is truly central to your mission, eliminate financial and structural obstacles that prevent some students from participating.

**Engage the whole campus:** Internationalization isn't just the work of a study abroad office; it requires commitment from faculty, staff, and leadership across the institution.

## Takeaways

The journey through the ACE Internationalization Laboratory has given CSB/SJU a more precise roadmap for making global engagement a meaningful part of every student's experience. By connecting international opportunities directly to career development through initiatives like the True North Journey, these institutions are working to ensure that studying abroad isn't just a memorable experience—it's a launchpad for professional success. The emphasis on "The Future is NOW" captures the urgency and excitement of this work: creating pathways so that all students, regardless of their background, can develop the global competencies that employers value and that our interconnected world requires.