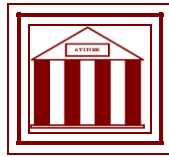


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**Lessons Learned:
A Longitudinal Case Study of
Transnational Distance
Education**

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ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

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Abstract

Many lessons have been learned during the 31-year transnational partnership between the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM) and the American Samoa Department of Education (ASDOE). The most important insight, however, has been the increased levels of understanding between both partners of the unique cultural and contextual components of the teaching and learning process in American Samoa. One size does not fit all when it comes to education and programs cannot be simply imported and exported between nations. While this case study cannot be generalized, the findings may be useful for decisions regarding the launching, developing, and sustaining of transnational distance learning programs. This paper describes key political, cultural, and financial issues that need to be considered in the creation of an effective transnational educational partnership that meets local professional development needs. We will also provide insight into the context, methods, issues, threats and solutions involved in extending university undergraduate and graduate teacher education across international borders.

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Introduction

Culture and context

Zeichner and Conklin (2008) suggest that in this era of standardization of teacher education programming, we pause to consider the *contexts* in which teachers and their students operate. To nurture and facilitate the professional development of caring, knowledgeable, and effective teachers, one must carefully study the context in which the teachers will teach. Transnational education programs must consider if adaptations to course content and delivery need to be made when the context of the distant campus differs from the host campus.

To tourists, Hawai'i and American Samoa may appear to be markedly similar in terms of location and population. Both are islands, in the Pacific, with warm weather and a predominantly local population. However, the two islands differ significantly. Differences, such as political, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts, will be described in this paper as key considerations when embarking on transnational education.

The University of Hawai'i College of Education vision of teacher education is a community of educators who provide innovative research, teaching, and leadership in an effort to further the field of education and prepare professionals to contribute to a just, diverse, and democratic society. The mission of the American Samoa Department of Education is to ensure student success by providing high quality teaching and learning opportunities to all our children. The merger of these two missions has resulted in a long-standing transnational partnership. Developing an understanding of the cultural, political, and financial issues unique to each place was a vital component in building an effective transnational partnership. For example, introducing a 100% online degree program in American Samoa sounds like a good idea. That is, until one considers the fact that not all teachers have access to reliable Internet connections or that teachers in American Samoa place great importance on face-to-face, oral communication with their instructors.

Teacher licensure

The transnational partnership between the UHM and the ASDOE was created to provide undergraduate and graduate education degrees to teachers in American Samoa. Currently, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) assessments are used to guide and assess the quality of university teacher education programs in the United States. Clearly, accreditation spurs the movement toward standardized teacher education in the United States and across U.S. borders when NCATE-accredited programs are delivered transnationally. The University of Hawai'i College of Education holds NCATE accreditation and is currently ranked thirty-five in the list of top Colleges of Education in the U.S. The same standards for degree completion are used in Hawai'i and in American Samoa, although candidates in Hawai'i complete the State of Hawai'i licensure requirements while candidates in American Samoa work towards fulfilling American Samoa Department of

Education certification requirements. Teachers in American Samoa completing the UHM programs are eligible for licensure in Hawai'i and in 44 other reciprocal U.S. states depending on the state's licensing requirements and passing Praxis scores.

Background

American Samoa cultural issues

Every educational institution exists within a larger social system. The ASDOE is part of American Samoan politics, economics, and culture that have been influenced by over 100 years of affiliation with U.S. educational philosophy and values. On Flag Day, April 17, 2012, American Samoa celebrated 112 years of association as an "unorganized and unincorporated Territory of the United States".

The organization of the American Samoan school system is part of American Samoan politics, economics, and culture. As a South Pacific nation, American Samoa has its own unique Samoan language and culture. Yet, the history of public schooling and teacher education in American Samoa is closely linked to the American colonization of this territory. Salu Hunkin Reid (1986) categorized the development of teacher education in American Samoa into four distinct phases: (a) Phase I: The United States Navy Administration (1904-1952), (b) Phase II: The Barstow Foundation Efforts (1932-1960), (c) Phase III: The Educational Television ETV Era (1962-1971), and (d) Phase IV: The Samoanization Movement (1972-1986). From 1986 through the present, American Samoa has partnered with UHM to provide coursework culminating in a Bachelor degree in education.

The successful partnership between the UHM and the ASDOE has had a profound influence on American Samoan teaching theory and practice. Total enrollment has significantly increased since the project's inception (Figure 1). In fact, the number of *different* individuals has steadily increased to a high of 224 in 2007.

The number of courses has also increased (Figure 2). These enrollment numbers illustrate the UHM teacher education programs' influence on American Samoan teaching theory and practice. The seventy-one courses offered by UHM in 2010 represents the most taught in the history of the project and is nearly seven times the number of courses offered in 1990.

Method of transnational degree delivery

The UHM provides an in-service teacher education program for a Bachelor of Education degree in Elementary Education. Teacher candidates are clustered into cohorts, ranging in size from 13 to 35 members. Each cohort is aligned with Samoan cultural *aiga* values because experience has indicated a positive impact on candidate retention. Each cohort has an on-island cohort coordinator who is a vital component of this transnational distance-learning model, since

they provide students with face-to-face access to someone familiar with both the local culture and customs of American Samoa and UHM.

The Cohort Program provides an established sequence of courses using UHM resources like *Laulima* and *Elluminate!*, and readily available online resources like, *Skype* and *Google Docs*. On average, students complete the program in 2-1/2 years. Sequenced instruction, consistent mentoring, peer support and team building are core components of the model and students who fall out-of-sequence can be moved to another cohort.

Teacher candidates entering the University of Hawaii American Samoa Teacher Education Program (UHASTEP) have between one to 20 years of classroom teaching experience. In 2010, there were four cohorts serving 147 teachers. Classes are currently held at local public schools because UHASTEP has never had an independent instructional facility. All required UHM courses are offered either “live” or through distance learning technology. The three full-time university cohort coordinators and one field supervisor that reside in American Samoa offer instruction for the majority of the courses. Temporary instructors, both indigenous and non-indigenous, are also hired to teach UHASTEP courses in American Samoa, generally over the three to five week Summer sessions. These courses can be 100% face-to-face, 100% on-line using *Elluminate!*, *Laulima* and other resources, or an online-face-to-face hybrid.

Standard-based assessments are used in Hawai'i and American Samoa as requirements for university accreditation. Teacher candidates create portfolios, write unit plans, demonstrate instruction under field supervision, and complete varied content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge assessments to document their proficiency in meeting the bachelor of education program standards. There are standardized rubrics for all of these assessments, yet the content of the assessments can be modified to be culturally relevant in American Samoa. For example, a candidate in American Samoa can create a unit plan on Samoan Flag Day while a candidate in Hawai'i creates a unit plan on May Day. In particular, portfolio assessment enables a transnational university to have consistent standards and cultural relevancy. Candidates merge educational theory and practice in the portfolio by using exemplars from their classroom teaching to document that they have proficiency in meeting the standard. Recently, teacher education programs have added teacher disposition criteria as part of curriculum and evaluation requirements. When measuring teacher quality, there is also increased emphasis on evaluating teacher work samples, or similar assessments that link teacher performance directly with student academic outcomes.

Issues

Qualitative typological analyses of the UHM participants' interview transcripts revealed emergent themes for consideration when establishing transnational education policy. The major lessons that emerged include cultural border-

crossing, language, authentic pedagogy, and programmatic risks such as shared governance, communication and political funding.

Cultural border-crossing

In Samoan culture, communal structures such as the village and family are the foundation for daily living. The cohort model mirrors these Samoan values. American Samoan teacher cohorts each design uniforms unique to their group, as is the custom in a Samoan village, business, *aiga*, or church community.

Figure 1 shows the positive impact of the cohort structure on candidate retention rates and course attendance. Similarly, online course attendance is much greater when candidates meet together and the online *Illuminate!* class is projected to the group. When UHM first began offering online courses, graduate candidates were given an *Illuminate!* link and told to independently log into the classes. Class attendance rates dropped. Candidates face real pressures to perform family and community duties and may choose to miss class to fulfill these obligations when they are not held accountable to a group of their colleagues.

An interview study (Zuercher, 2007) revealed that teacher candidates in the transnational university program both assimilated and resisted elements of the transnational university teacher education program. American Samoan educators perceived the reasons that they assimilated pedagogy advocated by the transnational university teacher education program as (a) gaining a new sense of pride and satisfaction in my work, (b) utilizing strategies that are effective for American Samoan students, and (c) meeting an urgent need for training for struggling in-service teachers. Candidates reported that they acquired a different perspective as a result of their participation in the teacher education program. Specifically, candidates reported gaining a student-centered perspective and professional teaching dispositions.

Candidates also assimilated many hands-on instruction strategies but the philosophical balancing act between university constructivist and ASDOE didactic pedagogy was named by each respondent as a problematic balancing act of trying to please two masters (Zuercher, 2007). The contrast between constructivist and didactic pedagogy often demanded a dualistic teaching style for American Samoan educators who work for the ASDOE during the day and take UHM teacher education courses at night. Candidates also struggled to assimilate the transnational university's value of democratic classroom management with traditional authoritative Samoan classroom management values. In addition, it was difficult for American Samoa candidates to meet transnational university expectations to become critical thinkers, agents of changes and educational leaders while maintaining their communal status in Samoa society. In some nations, if a poppy grows taller and stronger than others in a field, the poppy is praised, studied and emulated. In many Pacific island societies, if a poppy tries to grow taller and stronger than others, it is chopped off. Transnational candidates must continually wrestle with these opposing leadership behavioral expectations.

Language of Instruction

The language of instruction in American Samoa public schools and UHM courses is English. There is growing concern that the Samoa language and cultural arts will be lost if Samoan language and culture is not a part of teacher education. Feleti (2009) has documented that Samoan writing and grammar skills have declined among American Samoan Community College students. Generally, the transnational university is perceived as supplying 21st Century knowledge, including learning English as the dominant global business language, technology, and team problem-solving skills to remote regions. This is true, yet the University of Hawai'i is also looking for wiggle room in course requirements where Samoan language and culture can be increasingly integrated. The University of Hawai'i resonates with both dominant culture and indigenous Hawai'ian culture agendas.

Modeling pedagogy online

UHM education instructors resisted distance learning until technology advanced to the point where they could practice what they teach. *Illuminate!* and *Blackboard* technologies now enable instructors to model interactive constructivist teaching strategies. For example, instructors can use breakout rooms for small group discussions, engage candidates in Webquests, poll participants, facilitate collaborative Powerpoint presentations, utilize educational gaming, and provide audio/video demonstrations. The university also utilizes *Laulima* for collaborative document sharing, and *Illuminate!* class recordings, blogs and forum postings.

Programmatic Risks

Shared governance

Shared governance is a critical component in building a successful and sustainable transnational program. UHM is intentional about listening to participant voice and creating structure for shared governance. The UHM instructors consistently collect data on participants' perspectives of the transnational degree programs through course evaluations, interviews and surveys, focus group discussions, semester and annual evaluation reports and meetings, and the co-construction of program budgets and contracts. Fulltime indigenous on-island cohort coordinators meet online with University of Hawai'i staff bi-weekly to share in all aspects of decision-making regarding program operations. Tri-annual visits to American Samoa from the Director of the TTTAP at UHM are scheduled for timely face-to-face meetings with ASDOE administrators. These three meetings are critical communication touch points. Specifically, the university budget is presented during the fall visit, the annual program evaluation report is facilitated during the spring visit, and the intensive summer schedule of courses is managed during the summer visit. Transnational programs are relational programs and these visits are a critical component of nurturing relationships.

In sum, the UHM program administrators continuously conduct qualitative action research to analyze participants' perceptions and participants' performance. When possible, the university makes adjustments in the delivery of the program when participants voice concerns such as the rising costs of textbooks, the time scheduling of courses, English Language Learner adaptations, family and social time management pressures, and technology limitations. Close attention must be paid to participant voice because there seems to be a continuous stream of emergent issues that need to be addressed in order to sustain a transnational teacher education program.

Communication

Communicating across an ocean is difficult, particularly when Internet connections are unreliable. Clear communication is also complicated by perceived value differences in culture, politics, money and time management. Consequently, problems arise between the transnational university program administrators and local partners as well as between the teacher candidates and the university. Administrative issues involve the exchange of budgets, contracts and accountability reports. It is not uncommon for budget and contract drafts to be exchanged multiple times via email. Although revisions are carefully dated in the document title, old copies are too often mistakenly processed, causing delay and frustration between the two parties.

Part of the problem is that the budgets and contracts need to be routed through so many departments on both sides of the transnational partnership. The Samoan education contracts are approved, in order, by three divisions, the: (a) ASDOE, (b) Procurement Office, and c) Attorney General Office. When revisions are required, which is frequently the case, the contract must repeat the same approval and signature process all over again.

A second part of the problem is the revolving door of personnel who have the authority to approve administrative documents in a transnational program. Both the UHM and ASDOE have frequent changes in fiscal and administrative staff. As previously mentioned, a transnational program is a relational program and these relationships are difficult to maintain with constant personnel shifts. Clear and consistent communication establishes the foundation for these relationships.

The communication between teacher candidates and the transnational university is also a major challenge. In theory, it should be easy to provide teacher candidates with application materials and course registration numbers for online processing, but in practice, each semester is filled with application and registration problems. Internet and computer access limitations combined with old-fashioned human errors complicate the entire process.

Political funding

There is an urgent need for teacher education in American Samoa given that the majority of teachers have no degree or only an associate degree (Figure 3). The effort to enable teachers to earn education degrees is solely supported through a U.S. Federal grant. Thus, the American Samoa Department of

Education bases teacher education policy on criteria necessary to satisfy federal grant requirements in order to keep the funds flowing. This is no small matter given the fact that the American Samoan Department of Education has seen a total of \$784,006,596 go through its budget between the years 1990-2006 (American Samoa Department of Education, 2008). Given the huge dependence on federal funding for education in American Samoa, it is not surprising that the American Samoan Department of Education tries to comply with requests made by the U.S. Federal Department of Education. For example, since the passing of the No Child Left Behind and Highly Qualified Teacher legislation in 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), the American Samoa Department of Education has been working to define criteria to assess what a “highly qualified” American Samoan teacher is. Although American Samoa is certainly not alone as a U.S. territory or state in grappling with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and other Federal legislative demands, these demands are causing, yet another, shift in American Samoan teacher education history.

Recommendations

Three areas emerged from our work with teachers in American Samoa that present future opportunities.

Developing a sense of culture and community

The UHM cohort model, aligned with Samoan cultural values, has been successful in creating and nurturing professional relationships as a key component for success in American Samoa. Access to both synchronous and asynchronous online communication allows both students and instructors to remain in close contact. Face-to-face meetings, however, are essential because they help build a sense of community among all participants. The authors agree unequivocally with Ho and Burniske (2005) who suggest that without honoring the local community, and making time for its renewal on a regular basis, the online community would be difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

Dealing with new technology

Having access to technology does not mean that it will be fully utilized. This statement is true in American Samoa for a variety of reasons. First, cost prohibits many teachers from affording a computer or high-speed Internet access at home. We have found that having cohorts meet in groups, at specific sites that have the appropriate hardware, can alleviate this problem. Second, although *Elluminate!* and *Laulima* provide opportunities for transnational distance learning, the learning curve for teachers is much steeper when they cannot talk to someone face-to-face when questions arise. Local cohort coordinators can be invaluable in solving these problems.

Improving communication

Miscommunication can occur at any time, but it is quicker and easier to clarify things when one is face-to-face. The budget and contract draft problem could

have been solved by using something like *Google Docs* or *Dropbox* where the newest version of the written document could be posted and read by all parties. However, because of the sensitive nature of the material, the medium would need to be secure. Gathering digital signatures would decrease the time spent routing documents from one office to another. Hogan and Kedrayate (2010) support the view that multi-signed pieces of paper need to give way to online services to serve new educational markets. If voice or video communication were necessary, a program like *Skype* would work.

Teacher-student communication can also be a major challenge. For registration issues, access to sites with clear directions and flowcharts would be a good start, but we have experienced problems even when the instructions and procedures have been clearly explained several times. To solve this problem, we can use of *Elluminate!* where visual examples can be presented and questions can be answered in real-time to “walk” an entire cohort of students through the procedure at the same time.

Conclusion

The trust that is built between transnational partners is essential in helping to create and maintain a long-term relationship. The UHM and ASDOE have worked together for 31 years to make a positive difference in the lives of teachers and students. A total of 620 candidates in American Samoa have earned a bachelor degree in education through the transnational partnership. Distance learning technology has allowed us to bridge the geographical gap between Hawai'i and American Samoa. The relationship that has developed over time is built on a respectful, reciprocal and responsible give-and-take that exists between the faculty, administrators and candidates.

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Figure 1. Course Enrollment from 1990 - 2010.

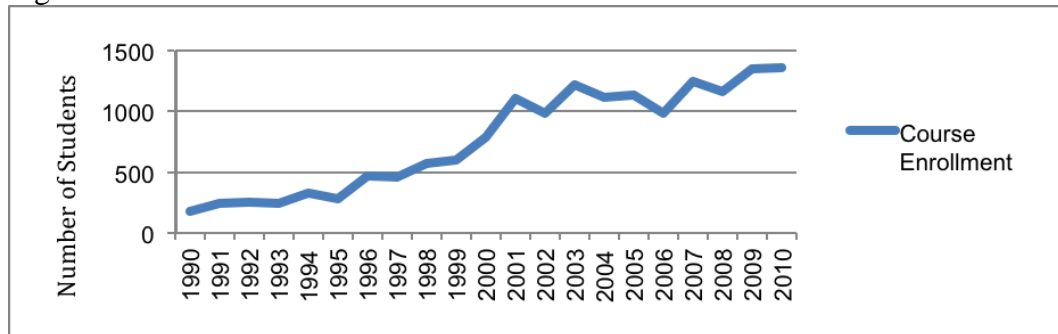


Figure 2. Number of Course Offerings from 1990 - 2010.

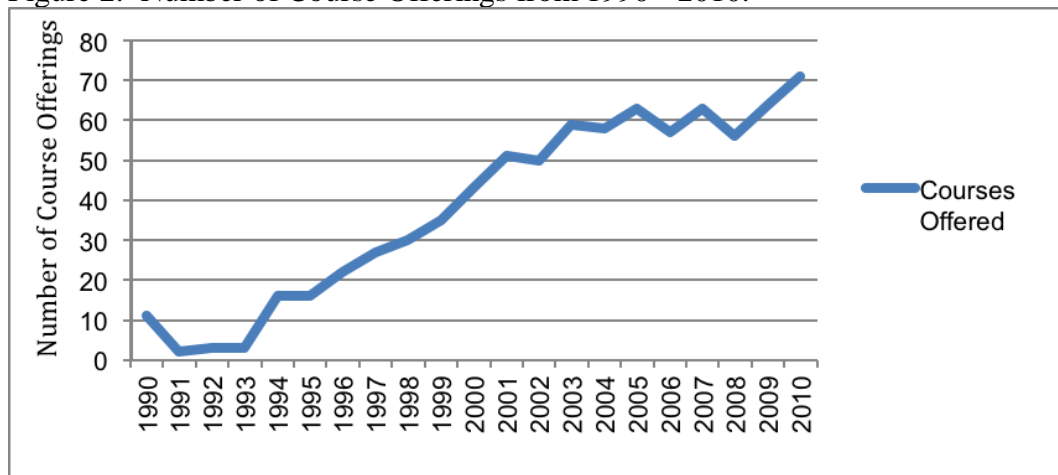


Figure 3. American Samoa Teacher Professional Degrees (American Samoa Department of Education Territorial Report Card, 2008).

