

# Criteria for University-level Strategic International Engagements

Mark S. Kamlet  
October 31, 2010

Carnegie Mellon has a diverse and innovative portfolio of global activities. We are building sustained global partnerships with governments, companies, other universities, as well as individual scholars, scientists, and artists. On any given day, there are students enrolled in over a dozen Carnegie Mellon degree programs offered overseas. Each year, hundreds of undergraduates do international projects and study abroad in dozens of countries. The percentage of international students in our graduate and undergraduate programs is among the largest in the United States. We now have a large number of active global alumni chapters. We receive increasing amounts of gifts from international alumni and research grants from abroad. To pick but one corner of campus, the Software Engineering Institute has interactions in over fifty countries. Most of our faculty work with colleagues outside the US every month, if not every day.

Our international engagements have grown substantially over the past decade, and have enhanced the university in many ways. One way that this is true, and to a degree greater than we anticipated when these efforts began to expand, is that they have had a surprisingly large impact on the university's overall reputation and its prestige, domestically as well as globally.

Most of Carnegie Mellon's myriad international engagements are developed and pursued in a relatively bottom-up way and pertain to particular parts of campus. They operate in a fairly self-contained fashion. These many efforts are not only important to their particular part of campus but cumulatively have added much to the Carnegie Mellon brand and reputation abroad. Taking nothing away from them or their impact, there is a smaller subset of international activities which by virtue of sheer scale, potential reputational implications, and alignment with broad university priorities, can be termed "university-level strategic engagements." These university-level strategic engagements clearly justify special attention and effort from the central administration and the Board of Trustees. This note addresses which international activities are most strategic to the university as a whole, and some of the criteria to assess why that is so.

Before turning to the criteria themselves, let me emphasize some of the preconditions that pertain to any international engagement. We must be confident we can ensure the quality and "value add" of the activities we seek to provide; that the operations will be secure; that the activities must be financially sustainable; that we can meet the many logistic demands that may arise; and that we can meet all the guidelines, policies, and procedures that Carnegie Mellon and the Board insist upon (ranging from the need for full control over admissions, curriculum, and faculty, to issues of academic freedom and other key university policies and constraints.) And, obviously, there must be a strong fit between what an international partner is seeking and Carnegie Mellon's comparative advantages and capabilities. (And it is for this reason that so many of our programs have been and likely will continue to play off the university's strengths in information technology, computer science, engineering, and so forth.)

With this as preamble, and at risk of oversimplification, here are three criteria that are highly relevant in assessing the university-wide strategic priority of a given international program or effort for Carnegie Mellon.

1. It is strategically important for Carnegie Mellon to engage meaningfully if we can in those areas of the world that are becoming the global centers of wealth creation, growth, and influence; to establish our name, brand, and reputation in these areas; and to become engaged with political, corporate, and civic elites in these areas. We seek to be a valued and trusted partner now, when these areas are striving to bring world class higher education into their countries; as they strive to develop their work forces and to base their future economic growth around knowledge and technology-based capabilities; and as they strive to develop their own research sophistication. If we do not act now we may not have the chance to in the future when they are well along the path in pursuit of these objectives.

Two geographic regions which stand out with regard to this strategic criterion are the Gulf in the Mideast, and the Far East (including India). Among our degree programs (and similar activities) one could place those in Qatar on the one hand, and those in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Australia, on the other hand, as fitting in this category. Additionally, and for these same reasons, India and China are clearly special strategic priorities as well, if not proving to be easy nuts to crack.

2. On rare occasions, some few institutions of higher education in the US have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and deeply, through their core activities of education and research, to pressing global tensions, and global human priorities, in ways that only they might. As it pertains to Carnegie Mellon's international engagements, there are two areas that stand out in this regard for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the relationship between the West and the Arab/Islamic world, and the imperative of the development of Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. There are surely many deep challenges facing our planet over the next hundred years—energy/environment and climate, the threat of nuclear war and of terrorism, the potential of lethal pandemics, and the stubbornness of deep poverty and lack of economic development. In dealing with these issues successfully there are few powder keg domains as important or as vexing as the relationship of the West with the Arab/Islamic world, or the development of the “lost continent” of one billion Africans. Were the university able to have meaningful impacts in these areas we would be contributing to humanity in ways that transcend even our outstanding normal missions and ambitions.
3. While efforts that stem from either of the above two criteria will doubtless be the key drivers of increases in reputation that may accrue to the university from its international efforts, a third criterion is financial. We are a university whose hallmark is not only its extraordinary rise to national and international prominence in only a forty year period, but also our having done so with a smaller financial base than virtually any of our peers. We generally feel we have a unique and successful “formula” for moving ahead as a top

research university—a formula based on comparative advantage, interdisciplinarity, and real world problem-solving and engagement. We have the right approach, and the right culture molded around that approach, to move higher still as an institution. The main constraint we face is in terms of resources. In this regard, we have to “hit on all cylinders” as an institution if we are to survive and thrive given our resource constraints. This includes the growth of professional masters programs, of which Carnegie Mellon has more by any metric than any university I know; it includes working hard on increasing philanthropic giving; it includes having a technology development and commercialization ecosystem that is one of the best in class in the country; and it includes global activities. We cannot afford not to be realistic about this. Not every international engagement will be or must be an economic home run, and some will even prove unsuccessful (and we always seek ways to ensure we can move away from these activities if that proves to be the case). But, collectively this is another important strategic criterion for us.

Obviously, not every potential international university-level strategic engagement is going to get five stars on each of the criteria set forth. And, these are not the only elements that enter into the cost-benefit analysis of considering any given alternative. Additional issues include what might be called the “band width” of the central administration and the availability of individual champions with regard to given efforts. I discuss this a bit further in the Appendix that follows. Nonetheless, hopefully the above criteria are useful for helping us think about Carnegie Mellon university-level strategic engagements in the international arena.

## **APPENDIX**

This appendix provides additional discussion on some of the themes mentioned above.

(i)

Almost all of our international engagements, including those that do not rise to being “university-level strategic engagements,” generally need to be able to avail themselves of a sophisticated and established university infrastructure for everything from accounting, legal, regulatory, tax, and auditing considerations; to physical facilities and IT capabilities; to the challenges of appointment, promotion, and tenure procedures and academic career ladders for faculty in a global university. This is sometimes not fully appreciated by peers who have tried to engage internationally until they experience it themselves. It has not always been without its challenges, and we will clearly continue to seek to improve yet further, but I believe Carnegie Mellon has built an infrastructure (funded primarily from revenues from our international engagements), in central and several of the colleges, to help address these considerations that is “best of class” among US institutions of higher education. This infrastructure also serves to gather lessons and experiences from different international engagements to inform other efforts that may be starting up.

(ii)

Trustees and others outside the day-to-day operations of the university may be surprised at the pervasiveness of the multiple international activities of the university that are strategic and important to the parts of campus involved if falling short of “university-level strategic engagements.” My own activities this past week illustrate this point. I was briefed on a range of activities we may be pursuing in Israel. I chatted with a department head about a potential dual degree program in the United Kingdom; with the Heinz College about ongoing efforts in a half-dozen countries in Latin and South America; with faculty in H&SS about projects in the Middle East and in Africa. This was not a particularly unusual week in terms of the drum beat of international engagements at Carnegie Mellon. And, this does not include discussions on potential activities with Korea and China; or the senior administration’s efforts at wrapping up negotiations on a major international research center; or the university’s potential further engagements in Asia and Africa.

(iii)

There have been many advantages to Carnegie Mellon from our international activities, apart from finances and reputational impacts. There have been more positive synergies of our international program experiences on our programs in Pittsburgh than we originally anticipated. We are a better university in Pittsburgh, in terms of curriculum, in terms of offering our Pittsburgh students linkages abroad, and in terms of the experiences of our international students at the Pittsburgh campus by virtue of our decade of international outreach.

Additionally, it is not infrequently the case that when we have developed a presence in another country, the applications from that country for undergraduate and graduate programs in Pittsburgh has increased markedly. This in turn has led to the beginnings of what might be called “virtuous cycles,” where our presence in a country enhances our reputation there. This leads to greater numbers of very top students there seeking to enroll in programs at Carnegie Mellon offered in Pittsburgh, as well as leading to corporations from these countries wishing to interact with faculty researchers in Pittsburgh as well as graduates of our Pittsburgh campus. And all that, in turn, enhances our reputation in that country further, and the cycle builds upon itself.

(iv)

The issue of the “bandwidth” demands of our international programs on senior administrators is a real one. I am completely biased, but in terms of the creativity, entrepreneurship, drive, teamwork, and energy devoted to the international agenda of Carnegie Mellon, the current senior administration is extraordinary. Here I refer to the president, provost, vice presidents, and deans. Also, some exceptional department heads and senior faculty. In talking to trustees over the years, this is the single biggest concern I have heard. And, it is an issue. But, I also want to push back a bit on it:

- (a) Carnegie Mellon has moved ahead in many ways over the past fifteen years on many fronts. That said, in terms of our reputation, internationally and among our U.S. peers, I am surprised at the impact of our international activities. Perhaps more so than we

even deserve, these international activities may be the biggest single contributor to the spread of our reputation. Yes, it takes time on the part of the senior administration. I think that if you summed up the trips abroad of the general counsel and myself to Qatar, the number would be well over fifty, and for the senior management team, hundreds. For thirteen years the President has visited countries in the Far East at least once a year. Anyone thinking this is not a good use of the president's time has not been at alumni group meetings in Mumbai or Taipei recently. The level of connections in India as a direct result of these visits is again hard to imagine without these efforts. Even if it does come at the cost of time on various domestic efforts, is this really such a bad way for the senior administration to have shifted some of its attention, time and energy? After all, "international" was an important component of the Carnegie Mellon's 1998 Strategic Plan and is one of the six basic pillars of Carnegie Mellon's 2008 Strategic Plan.

- (b) The energy and talent we have developed and displayed over the past decade on international activities, even on "university-level strategic engagements," is deeper than the senior administration. While, it is true that the origination of some international efforts require what Weber would have termed "charismatic" leadership, this does evolve over time to "institutionalization." Moreover, as mentioned in the text, Carnegie Mellon has built within the colleges and within central one of the best international infrastructures of any university in the U.S. on all sorts of matters, ranging from tax, legal, audit, accounting, academic career ladders, administrative management, and more. It would be misleading to underestimate the degree the senior administration can and does turn things over to a very capable set of teams throughout the university as programs and activities develop and mature.
- (c) I hate to think of the strains and burdens on senior administration bandwidth, let alone the campus welfare as a whole, were it not for the additional net unrestricted resources provided to the university over the past years from the international activities we have developed. In the last accounting of these programs, the additional net revenues were approximately \$10,000,000 per year—equivalent to the draw from an additional \$200M of unrestricted endowment.