

Institutional Reflections on Ten Years of the Kean University and Wenzhou– Kean University Student Exchange Program: Building Bridges

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2015, KUSA and WKU have jointly developed a robust student exchange program that has engaged more than 2,300 participants. Distinguished by its scale, participant diversity, and institutional composition, the program exemplifies an innovative model of cross-campus collaboration. Its success lies in the joint coordination between the Center for International Studies at both institutions, ensuring consistency in vision and implementation. Students from each campus pursue the exchange for varied academic and cultural motivations, while staff across continents operate cohesively as one team, managing the full cycle of sending and receiving students. Led by Dr. Haina Zhu, Dean of Students at WKU, and Jessica Goldsmith

Barzilay, MSW, Assistant Vice President for Global Initiatives at KUSA, this chapter presents reflective insights from leaders who have shaped and sustained this transnational partnership.

INTRODUCTION: ADMINISTRATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Student exchange programs are often narrated through the voices of participants, bold students who are compelled, for a variety of different reasons to study abroad. While such perspectives are essential, they represent only one dimension of international exchange. An exchange program is made up of more than the sum of its student participants. It is made up of the participating countries- their traditions and norms, the moment in time, the participating institutions, the political relations of the countries, the perceptions students bring with them, the policies and procedures that allow people to join or perhaps keep people out. This chapter offers an administrative reflection on a long-standing student exchange program between Kean University in the United States and Wenzhou-Kean University in China. It examines the role of vision, operational practice, administrator perspectives, and how these come together in intentional strategies for the exchange. The chapter is written from the perspective of the administrators and leadership of the program from its inception to its current iteration. Administrative actors occupy a unique location within international education. They work at the intersection of institutional missions, student experience, regulatory constraint, and geopolitical context. Their responsibilities extend beyond facilitating mobility to ensure access, equity, safety, and continuity in environments that are often uncertain and politically sensitive. This chapter reveals the decision making, the processes, the struggles, and the ever-evolving intentional design, essential to the success of an international exchange program.

Since its launch in 2015, the exchange program between Kean University and Wenzhou-Kean University has grown into one of the most extensive and sustained partnerships of its kind involving a public United States university operating a full campus in China. Over time, the program has engaged over 2,000 students across both campuses, many of whom are first-generation college students or come from backgrounds historically underrepresented in international education. The scale and composition of the program challenge common assumptions about who participates in global learning and under what conditions. This chapter examines the exchange through processes of care, coordination, and learning that occur behind the scenes. It also reveals how leadership perspectives evolve in response to student needs, institutional priorities, and external disruptions, including global crises.

The chapter is particularly attentive to moments of tension and disruption, such as the global Covid pandemic. These moments exposed vulnerabilities within inter-

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