

Workshop on

“Developing *Family Studies* as a discipline internationally: the creation of a graduate program in International Family Studies”.

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On behalf of my entire team at the GCIFS, I would first like to thank the ICCFR for inviting me to share our experiences of developing *Family Studies* as a discipline internationally. We attempted to do this by creating a Master’s program in International Family Studies, through a unique model of global partnership in the form of the Global Consortium for International Family Studies (GCIFS).

The past decade has seen significant growth in the internationalisation of higher education. Unfortunately, internationalization of higher education has often meant developing campuses in other countries and replicating programs taught in host universities in those campuses. I feel that a significant dimension of internationalization of higher education is an intercultural curriculum which involves much more than mere inclusion of information on other cultures and countries in the course content. For us it meant offering students from diverse countries an opportunity to develop and expand their intercultural competencies in academic, professional and personal contexts by applying non-judgmental approaches and critical thinking to specific academic, professional and personal contexts.

Given this understanding and the fact that the on line mode of offering higher education has opened up new possibilities, the Global Consortium for in Family Studies (GCIFS) decided to dedicate itself to the pursuit of educational excellence in Family Studies. This morning I am going to share with you our experiment in developing and offering an intercultural and international Program in International Family Studies at the Master’s level in the on line mode. We hope it will motivate colleagues to venture into such collaborative efforts including joining us.

All of you come for this conference because though you are from different disciplines, “the Family” is a common theme of interest to many social science disciplines. The field of Family Studies, also known as Family Science, is a field of research and practice is now recognized as a separate social science discipline, with ‘its own unique assumptions, paradigms, methodologies and worldview’ (Burr et al., in Hollinger, 2002, p. 299)¹.

Why did we choose to grow the field nationally and internationally? Today, there is a growing recognition that it is the discipline of Family Studies which has highlighted that outcome in areas such as health care, child development, education, law, family relationship and support services, business and industrial relations at the local and national levels are greatly impacted by family context and relationships. Family Studies knowledge is therefore relevant to

a wide range of professionals working in government, non-government and corporate sectors, both nationally and internationally.

There is also a growing realization that the well-being of individuals and families is today not only a national but a global concern and a human rights issue. Supporting families in their diversity of form and need is a priority in most countries and as investment in family programs grow so will the recognition that the field of working with families is becoming more complex and requires a skilled and highly educated human services workforce. Consequently, as the family as a focus for study in higher education increases in significance, there will be a need for creating enhanced education and training opportunities for professionals working in this field (McDonald, 2010).

Aim of GCIFS: Through the GCIFS we aimed at offering a unique global educational experience that produces expertly trained and culturally competent graduates with specialist interdisciplinary knowledge and skills, and the cultural competency required to work with increasingly diverse populations.

This is actually a story of a group of university teachers who strongly believed that contemporary families across the world have strengths, resilience and capacity to change with changing times but they warrant special attention and support to assume their responsibilities within the community. This motley group of university teachers from different continents also believed that an intercultural curriculum is a significant dimension of internationalization of higher education and that international collaborations actually work. This motley group of educators was brought together by the initiative taken by Prof. John DeFrain and his colleagues in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, University of Nebraska, USA.

From 2008 onwards for the next eight years, a small group of Family specialists from the following Universities across the globe met face to face to form a Global Consortium in International Family Studies and to collaboratively develop a unique model of intercultural education in international family studies: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece; Seoul National University, Seoul, Republic of Korea; South China Normal University in Guangzhou, People's Republic of China; East China Normal University, Shanghai, People's Republic of China; The University of Newcastle, Callaghan, New South Wales, Australia; The Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, India; University of Nebraska, Lincoln, USA.

The annual meetings took place in rotation at each of the participating universities as a deliberate strategy. Our main purpose at the meetings was of course to work together on the structure and content of the program and on the constitution and governance structure of the GCIFS. Our other equally important purpose was to support our colleagues from the host University which we were visiting, by having meetings with some of their senior administrators and decision makers. The main thrust of these meetings was to stress on the value of their university joining other world renowned international universities for forming the Global consortium for International Family Studies (GCIFS), and the importance and unique nature of the graduate program of study that the international team of educators from these universities were currently collaboratively working on.

Through the years we continued to work together, enthusiastically, diligently and with a tremendous sense of purpose as we collaboratively put together the structure and content of the M.A. program on the one hand and on the constitution and governance structure of the GCIFS on the other. A lot of out of the box thinking and problem solving went into sorting out administrative issues, such as fee structure, admission policy, library access as well as creating teaching schedules which was acceptable to all three universities. As TISS faculty did not have any experience of teaching in on line programs, TISS went about building their capacity through successfully anchoring and participating in a learnshop on Instructional Design for teaching in on-line programs which was conducted for us by two technical team members from UNL.

Requirements for the formation of a Global Consortium and an International Program of Study: When we started out in 2008-2009, we knew we were embarking on an exciting but complicated journey and we were not at all sure of how we would fit all the pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that we had given ourselves. What we did know is that we all strongly believed in what we were doing, we had the patience and perseverance to plod on and the total optimism that we would achieve our goals. Our understanding of all the tasks involved was an evolving one. As we worked together we realized that the formation of a Global Consortium would require:

- An MOA between the partners;
- A Consortium Governance Agreement Manual and the Policy and Procedure Manual for the program of study to be offered by the consortium.
- Creation of a fund for meeting the expenses of the consortium
- Creation of a website
- Decision about its legal status.

Issues and challenges faced in signing an MOA between the partners:

This was an important but difficult task. For the Management of the partner universities to sign an MOA, they had to be convinced about the uniqueness and viability of the venture.

In order to support our teacher colleagues, as a matter of deliberate strategy, we held our face to face meeting in each of our universities in rotation. During our visit, we would have meetings with some of the senior administrators and decision makers of the host University. The main thrust of these meetings was to stress on the value of their university joining other world renowned international universities for forming the Global consortium for International Family Studies (GCIFS), and the importance and unique nature of the graduate program of study that the international team of educators from these universities were currently collaboratively working on. By 2013, three founder universities were ready to sign an MOA, namely, UNL, Uon and TISS.

Development of a seamless International M.A. Program in Family Studies

The development of a seamless International M.A. Program in Family Studies would require us to sort out:

- Program structure- core courses, electives, special project; and course content and teaching schedule
- Administrative structure within each University

- Administrative processes for the program- minimum eligibility, admissions process, fees, student strength, equal teaching work load, contracting teachers, registration of students and awarding the degree, Library access, the place of the program within each university set up, etc.
- Student and Teacher Manuals.

Formation of the Consortium:

- Final name of the consortium agreed upon was the **Global Consortium for International Family Studies (GCIFS)**. The consortium logo was adopted.
- By 2011, the vision and mission statement for the consortium, goals, principles, composition and tasks of the consortium were drawn up. The first chairperson of the consortium was also elected for two year tenure. It was decided that the central secretariat for the consortium would be housed in the chairperson's university.
- In 2012, the first Board meeting of the GCIFS was held at the Family Action Centre of the University of Newcastle with members from the three founding institutions and with two representatives of the South China Normal University, Shanghai who was currently considered as an emerging member. Aristotle University though not present at the meeting was also considered as an emerging member of the Board.
- In 2013, the second meeting of the Governing Board took place in which the Consortium Executive officer was also present.
- In 2013, the Governance Agreement Manual and the Policy and Procedure Manual for the M. A. in International Family Studies were finalized.
- Common expenses for the Consortium were identified and each university committed to contributing towards the running of the consortium was decided upon.
- It was decided that the Consortium would not be a legal entity and so would not need to be registered as an INGO or a Trust.
- In 2013, The Consortium website was created and became alive.

Development of the M.A. program in Family Studies: Issues and challenges.

- Finalized the title of the program to M.A. in International Family Studies.
- Finalized the ideological base the program.
- Broad objectives for the program were developed and a template for developing the course outlines including amount of activity and assessment items each course should have was developed. In order to build an international content into each course, teacher teams were drawn up consisting of teachers from partner institutions for each course.
- We started with envisaging 38 courses in 2008-09 including core and elective courses. In 2012, came down to a realistic structure of 7 core courses and one special project.
- A working group tasked to review all course outlines in terms of the flow, gaps as well as overlaps across courses gave valuable feedback to course teachers and this helped to make the program vibrant and interesting.
- Library access in all the three institutions was worked out.
- Each University in the consortium was left to work out the details of how they would pitch the M.A. in International Family Studies and place it within their realities.

- As the University of Nebraska was using Blackboard as the platform for their other on-line programs, it offered to host this program on their Blackboard site.
- The program launch was scheduled for September, 2013.
- By 2013, three Universities, that is UNL, UON and TISS had successfully steered the proposal for the M.A. program through their University's Academic Bodies.
- It was therefore decided that for the first two years the teaching would be done by the teachers from the three founding institutions only.
- A proposed schedule was drawn up for the first two years keeping in mind an almost equal work load for each of the three institutions. The academic year was divided into three terms of fourteen weeks each term, keeping in mind the work schedules of the three universities. Courses were more or less equally distributed among the three institutions and each course was assigned a teaching institution and an observer institution. Every two years the teaching of a course would be rotated between the teaching and observer institution. For the emerging institutions, they would contribute to course development in 2013/14; if they wished, they could be observers for the courses assigned to them. In 2015, the teaching schedule would be reviewed.

Challenges and Breakthrough in Administrative processes

- Great disparity in fees charged by participating universities. Breakthrough- Each partner University will decide on the fees it will charge to the students admitted/ registered through their university.
- In order to maintain parity, each of the six Universities will admit only 6 to 8 students per year so that in the first year the program has approximately 36 to 48 international students.
- Selection process to be left to each university. Each university will enrol according to their own university's admission processes.

However, minimum eligibility for selection was set as follows:-

Bachelor degree recognized by their university; Proficiency in English as it will be the language of instruction; Computer literacy/ability to use the on-line internet; Willingness and enthusiasm to learn in a cross-cultural situation (high tolerance, flexible, understanding, acceptance, - this is for the instructor/university to put across to the students).

Parity between Universities was maintained in the following manner: Each partner University will decide on the mode of contracting their teachers to teach courses in this program; In principle, each partner university will have an equal teaching workload, that is, each partner university will take the responsibility for teaching one core course and one elective course per year or 4 courses during the two year program in any combination of core and elective courses. However we also accepted that some of our partner universities may take a few years to participate fully in the program; Each university will confer the degree of their own university to the students admitted/ registered by them for the program on their successful completion of the program. In addition, the GCFS will also give each student a certificate on successful completion of the comprehensive program.

Where are we now?

- The master's program was successfully launched on Sept 15, 2013 with a cohort of 14 students.
- On September, 15, 2014, the second batch of students has registered for the first term of the program.
- The consortium website is live and is in the process of being further enhanced.
- Our next Board meeting and meeting of the teacher team is scheduled for January, 2015 at TISS, which will be preceded by an International Conference titled, "Changing World - Changing Families: Diversity and Synergy".

Lessons learnt: International collaborations work when the following conditions are met:

- The partner universities have a department which is involved in teaching, research and field action in the area of family studies.
- The University Department concerned has been recognized by its university as competent to be able to anchor and offer the program of study in whatever form.
- Senior teachers who have decision making powers are involved in the program.
- Senior teachers involve other members of their department in the program so that there is sufficient number of teachers for teaching the courses and the department is able to take ownership for the program.
- Senior teachers who are also administrators are part of the team as they play a crucial role in obtaining the requisite approvals and support from the University management.
- The partner Universities are individually prepared to generate some funds for participating in meetings and sustaining themselves in the initial years until the program becomes financially self sufficient.

Thank you