

How does Organizational Differentiation Shape Internationalization? Lessons from a Cross-organizational and Cross-national Comparison

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Internationalization has garnered much interest in the study of higher education over the past two decades. From worldwide growth in international student mobility to the expansive arena of transnational education, cross-border activities of various kinds have been greeted as a new frontier for university operations. Yet while numerous studies have looked at different facets of the changes wrought by globalization, there have been few systematic comparisons of how universities have participated in, facilitated, or encouraged internationalization variably. Despite widespread recognition that universities have different histories and missions and that they have likely reacted to globalization in variable ways, many questions remain unanswered concerning what internationalization looks like in different organizational contexts. In particular, my research examines how internationalization has been prioritized variably, attached to different university reform efforts, taken on different meanings, or led to differing educational opportunities for students.

This gap in scholarship is addressed in this study, which draws on theories from organizational and cultural sociology to compare internationalization among eight universities in the US and the UK. In both of these countries, mass higher education is widely perceived as a hierarchical field, with high- and low-status universities differentiated from one another. These universities serve different kinds of students, offer different kinds of degrees, and funnel students into different tiers of the labor market (Boliver 2011; Mullen 2010; Wakeling and Savage 2015). How then have these hierarchical dynamics led to varying enactments of internationalization as an organizational reform? To answer this question, this study looks at case universities drawn from the bookends of these two

higher education systems, with two Russell Group members and two post-92 institutions selected from the UK, and two R1 universities and two regional institutions selected from the US. The empirical cache of data includes 75 semi-structured interviews with varied university personnel from these sites and a wide range of other case study materials. Together the data illustrates how these universities have varied in engaging internationalization activities such as promoting study abroad, recruiting international students, incentivizing curricular change, organizing central international offices, or branding themselves as 'global.' Analysis of the qualitative data complements these findings, by focusing on cultural variation in how university personnel talk and think about internationalization relative to one another. This illuminates numerous differences both cross-nationally and cross-organizationally in the discourses and practices associated with internationalization.

One of the main findings from the study is how strongly the enactment of internationalization has varied between the eight case universities. Comporting with existing theory concerning the role of organizational status and identity in processes of change (Pearce 2011; Phillips and Zuckerman 2001; Whetten and Godfrey 1998), there are strong patterns cross-nationally in the ways that internationalization has been defined, prioritized, and enacted. Two universities in the study with a short-term history of elite status have been bold enactors of change in multiple arenas, promoting internationalization in numerous forms and defining themselves as global universities internally and externally. In contrast, two universities in the study with a more robust legacy of historic prestige have been comparatively reluctant to engage in internationalization, participating in this wave of change

more selectively. Although these more prestigious universities have come to be seen as worldwide leaders in the emerging global field of higher education (Marginson 2008), discourses of global citizenship, and opportunities for educational travel, have been more prevalent at the two universities which have arguably been challenging them to better establish their relative standing. Meanwhile, the four low-status universities in this study have many passionate advocates for internationalization to benefit their students, but face numerous constraints in promoting these programs, not least of which is the view that these activities are of secondary importance to their universities by some of their colleagues. Overall, these findings highlight a contest for prestige taking place around internationalization among the elite universities in the study, and the constrained emulation of these activities among their lower-status counterparts. Findings also highlight how status remains central to the higher education enterprise, in ways previously theorized by Randall Collins (1979) as well as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

This study promises to be of interest to scholars looking to examine internationalization comparatively, as well as a wide range of international education practitioners. It will highlight the importance of building an understanding of global trends in higher education through comparative analysis of organizational cases, rather than through general observations of change worldwide. It will also offer new analytic tools for examining internationalization as a process of organizational change, and suggest ways that the mainstreaming of global citizenship is tied up with contests for organizational status, as well as the reproduction of social inequality. In raising questions about the hierarchical structuring of internationalization, the study will contribute novel interpretation of this wave of change, and push scholars in the field to consider it in a new light.

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