

DIFFERENTIATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING AFRICAN COUNTRIES: A STRATEGIC PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a case study of US University College (USUC), a new entrepreneurial private college in Ethiopia, and its developing relationship with California State University Dominguez Hills (CSUDH). The Ethiopian college is struggling to position itself and create sustainability in an underdeveloped but rapidly growing economic environment and CSUDH is attempting to assist it in incorporating world-class curriculum and standards as well as high impact educational practices. This study explores the challenges of developing a twinning relationship between the two universities, to the mutual benefit of both in order to address the challenges.

How will faculty from CSUDH help a struggling Ethiopian college (USUC) develop the skills and resources to be able to deliver world-class education across a range of undergraduate and Masters programs; while at the same time obtain something from this relationship to enhance the specific management courses and programs at CSUDH?

US University College was founded in 2007 by a US-based Ethiopian expatriate who returned to Ethiopia to provide post-secondary education in areas such as surveying, computer technology, and bookkeeping. The college has since expanded to include Baccalaureate Degrees in Accounting and Business Management. The college has 3,000 students on three campuses.

Underlying issues include significant economic and technological disparities that separate the two countries and make collaboration difficult. Physical barriers such as language and time differences add to the difficulties. From the American perspective, students from CSUDH could in some way interact with African USUC students to obtain cross-cultural experience and learn about comparative management. From the African perspective, USUC could integrate American pedagogy, technology, and content into their program in order to raise the quality of education offered.

A critical shortage of as many as 4 million skilled indigenous managers exists in Africa according to recent studies. The CSUDH-USUC twinning process is facilitating educational capacity building in Ethiopia, while at the same time providing challenging international experiences for American students and faculty. This approach is fundamentally different from that used by aid agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which operate on the principles of philanthropy. Other entities such as those from China use a colonial approach.

In both instances, the client system is left out of the decision making and is at a disadvantage when it comes to project benefits. In the CSUDH approach, both sides provide resources, expertise and contribute equally to the setting and accomplishment of goals that satisfy the needs of both. Thus, the present project is collaborative rather than philanthropic or colonial.