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# A Role of the University Leader in the 21st Century: A Case Study at Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Thailand

Wanwadee Chaichankul  
*Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University*

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## **Chaichankul, W. Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Thailand A Role of the University Leader in the 21st Century: A Case Study at Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Thailand**

Assistant Professor Wanwadee Chaichankul

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, Thailand  
[Wanwadee48@yahoo.com](mailto:Wanwadee48@yahoo.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

Learning is a life-long process, it requires dedication and motivation on the students and lecturers part; and resources and moral support on the administrators part.

A leader's duty in an educational institution is to provide a system where the lecturers achieve the desired learning outcome not only because they are empowered, competent and accountable, but also because they care. The co-administrators must exercise visionary leadership responsive to emerging learning needs of the nation; ensure adequate resources; promote appropriate technology; create and sustain a climate conducive to enhancing learning. The 21st century educational world is becoming highly competitive in many aspects. The leader's primary role is to foster an organization committed to a culture of excellence in public service, with the emphasis on human resources being most important for our country.

This article aims to assist higher education institute leaders to continuously improve the leadership practice in terms of competency and commitment from whatever level it begins, regardless of conditions prevailing and resources available. Moreover, it aims to explain the challenges facing the administrators in promoting higher education in the global community as well as developing the international links with appropriate organizations and individuals.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Being Thai people, we cannot help being proud of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who recently hosted Royalty from 27 countries in celebration of the 60th anniversary of his accession to the Throne. As the society is always on the move and it is not easy to understand the complexity of the stages of development. King Bhumibol's ability to adapt to changing situations underpins his role as King but he remains a leader without leading. His Majesty the King's coronation speech, 'We will rule the land with justice for the happiness of the Siamese people', should serve as a lesson for everyone in the state sector. His Majesty the King is the one who knows every inch of his land and every detail of his people. For the past 59 years, His Majesty has done a great deal to make this land secure, stable, strong and serene. We are all responsible for cherishing and taking care of our treasure and to help alleviate the heavy burdens that His Majesty has been carrying for over half a century. If the Thais or people in the world follow His Majesty's concept of "Knowledge, Affection, Solidarity and Engagement", this country and its treasures will pass undiminished to future generations. Therefore, to follow royal advice one must be clean, persevering, ethical and of good morals. This should be the leadership example in every aspect of any organization, be it business or educational institution.

The university is taking on an ever more important role in the world and has contributed to the transmission, procession, application, and creation of knowledge. Moreover, the university has been very active in the training of high-quality students, the advancement of scientific research, and the overall development of society. Thus, a leader in higher education can be counted as an engine of university development. He or she has to be a thoroughly modern university manager,

an outsider who is respectful of academic values and impatient with academic cant, passionate about excellence and equity, and could be just the right person for the right job. In this 21st century, leaders are expected to offer the dual qualifications of leadership and management.

## DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the central concept underpinning some key features of this article. The concept has been defined in various ways. Adams (2003) considers leadership as common sense, hard work and discipline coupled with self-sacrifice. It is good judgment topped with honesty and ethics. Leadership means to lead and a leader needs willing followers, not conscripts. Leadership in politics or business means the ability to inspire others to follow his path - to have them volunteer to take up arms in his cause because they believe in him and believe in what he says. The effectiveness of a leader's command can be reduced to two words, "trust and faith." Otte (2004) defined leadership as a relationship between the leader and the follower applied in the accomplishment of a positive goal, with an understanding of the relationship between leader and follower. He summarized an interesting seven-letter acronym for leadership: L is for love, E is for example, A is for be an A player, D is for do, E is for (no) excuses, R is for representative, and S is for the (relation)ship between leader and follower. Heymann (2001) pointed out that there is substantial confusion regarding the meaning of the word leadership, and suggested four possible meanings. First, leadership can be defined as a formal position with a concrete set of goals. Second, it can be defined as broad approval and commendation for success in accomplishing societal, organizational, or personal goals. Third, leadership can be defined in terms of a set of characteristics (e.g., vision, integrity, drive) commonly held by individuals who serve as role models in setting and accomplishing important goals. Finally, the concept can be described as a course of action or a way of behaving when defined in terms of leading, rather than in terms of the condition or state of being implied by the nouns leader or leadership.

Some commentators link leadership closely with the idea of management. The leader's role is to impart a sense of vision, a purpose, the strategic intent, a dream, a mission. Whatever it is called, a leader must personify the essence of an organization's purpose and objectives. Management, on the other hand, is simply concerned with doing things right. Management is concerned with efficiency, with control mechanisms and the short term. Essentially, the manager administers and the leader innovates. The manager is a copy while the leader is an original. The manager maintains while the leader develops. The manager accepts the status quo while the leader is always questioning and challenging dogma. The manager focuses on the systems and structure while the leader focuses on people. The manager relies on the control while the leader inspires trust. The manager has a short-range view while the leader has a long-range perspective. The manager imitates while the leader originates. (Bennis, 1994).

However, a clear distinction between management and leadership may nevertheless prove useful. This would allow for a reciprocal relationship between leadership and management, implying that an effective manager should possess leadership skills, and an effective leader should demonstrate management skills. Abraham Zaleznik (1977), for example, delineated differences between leadership and management. He saw leaders as inspiring visionaries, concerned about substance. At the same time he viewed managers as planners with concerns about process. Paul Birch (1999) also sees a distinction between leadership and management. He observed that as a broad generalization, managers concerned themselves with tasks, while leaders concerned themselves with people. Birch does not suggest that leaders do not focus on "the task." Indeed, the things that characterize a great leader include the fact that they achieve. The difference lies in the leader realizing that the achievement of the task comes about through the goodwill and support of others, while the manager may not.

Differences in the mix of leadership and management can define various management styles. Some management styles tend to lower the emphasis on leadership. Included in this group one could include participatory management, democratic management, and collaborative management styles. Other management styles, such as authoritarian management, micro-management, and top-down management, depend more on a leader to provide direction. Note, however, that just

because an organization has no single leader giving it direction, does not mean it necessarily has weak leadership. In many cases group leadership (multiple leaders) can prove effective. Having a single leader (as in dictatorship) allows for quick and decisive decision-making when needed as well as when not needed. Group decision-making sometimes earns the derisive label because of the longer times required to make decisions, but group leadership can bring more expertise, experience, and perspectives through a democratic process.

## THE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT'S ROLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In today's rapidly changing workplace, it is critically important that our leaders are provided with as many informational tools as possible to meet the challenges of their positions. Modern societies now entrust universities with greater responsibilities than ever before. Universities are charged with preserving the knowledge of the past and transmitting it to the next generation; educating tomorrow's citizens, professionals, and leaders; and fostering the discovery of new knowledge that may either strengthen or challenge established ideas and norms -- all with the aim of deepening human understanding and bettering the human condition. They also function as engines of economic development, foster technological and scientific innovation, stimulate creativity in the arts and literature, and address urgent global problems such as poverty, disease, ethno-political conflict, and environmental degradation.

The President is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the institution, overseeing all operations of the university, from academic affairs and international initiatives, to enrolment and student life, and is responsible for setting future goals and directions for the university. The President also serves as a national and international ambassador for the university community. The President acts on behalf of the Board of Trustees which delegates its authority to him. In addition to the Board's monitoring and review of the President's performance, the President consults regularly with all of the university's constituencies. The Faculty Senate, the Student Advisory Councils, Staff Council, the Diversity Advisory Council and the Alumni Association's Executive Board provide structural mechanisms for consultation. The President meets with each department's faculty head, holds regular student and staff hours and makes himself available to the community. In the past the description of the president's powers carried academic but little administrative authority. At this moment the University president has truly become 'president', in fact as well as in theory, the chief executive officer of the university.

In the 21st century atmosphere, however, it became clear that running the University is beyond the ability of any one person to administer. As demand for tertiary education grows the University is planning the expansion of its existing campuses and the creation of many new ones. Recognizing that these new circumstances required new ways of organizing the University, the president embarked on a course of decentralizing authority and responsibility to individual campuses and Campus Directors. Each seeks excellence in its own way but is unified by common standards for the admission of students, the appointment and promotion of faculty, the approval of academic programs, and is united in its pursuit of the common goals of educating students, discovering and creating knowledge, and serving the community. The University President would have the full authority to use the university resources, and the exchange of visits. Only then routine will be reduced to a minimum. Rectors of faculties would in turn share certain responsibilities similar to those of the president of the university. Less focus on paper work and routine will allow the administrative staff to focus more on important issues, such as the strategy of higher education, cooperation with neighbouring universities, and raising the educational level of both students and teachers. This will make a difference.

Generally, the University President controls two main sectors: the annual budget and fundraising. Outside of these responsibilities, any policy the president wants to implement is subject to an extensive review and approval process by many individuals and groups. He is the ultimate fall guy for any major University mishap. (Casper, 2001) Within this century multi-system; the president's most important duties should be the following:

- The president is responsible for recommending to the appointment for the year reviews of his/her performance; an influence on the character, quality, and success of the University.
- The president is responsible for recommending new policy directions to the University. It is on these issues that the president is expected to lead. This cannot be done successfully without widespread consultation among faculty, staff, students, and any other affected stakeholders.
- The president is responsible for preparing and managing the budget of the University. The Office of the President, through the University Auditor, sets university wide policies and professional standards in this area, monitors and audits activities throughout the system.
- Presidents bear ultimate responsibility for the University--and are regularly and forcefully reminded of that fact by unhappy officials, irate citizens and, on occasion, dissatisfied students.
- The president is responsible for distinct, visionary leadership. But if he does not have direct power to influence the workings of the university, should he be held accountable for failure to implement his vision?

The philosophical question begging consideration is this: Should one person be held ultimately responsible for the University's well-being despite having little immediate power?

The large number of jobs that belong to the president, as well as the president's accountability to a large number of people within the University, certainly checks his power. Therefore, a system of checks and balances is necessary. Although the president is not the only person who represents the University, he or she is the only person who can speak on behalf of the entire University. The president is the bridge to each faculty on behalf of the academic interests of the University; students, staff and alumni on behalf of their constituencies. The president must see that the various members of the University huge extended family are talking to each other, working with each other, and headed in roughly the same direction. This is neither easy nor always achievable, especially in times of controversy and conflict, but it is essential.

#### BANSOMDEJCHAOPRAYA RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY: THE CONTEXT FOR CHANGE

Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University (BSRU), as it is now known, was established in 1896. In accordance with the Royal wishes of King Rama V, was established as a secondary school. Later it had a new function under the name of Bansomdejchaopraya Teachers' Training School. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej bestowed the name "Rajabhat Institute", and became the university in June 2004. Therefore, the forty-one Rajabhat Universities in eight geographical groups around Thailand feel highly honoured and very proud to be the local universities under seven missions : Stable Economic Development; Inter-University Active Player; Leader in Academic-Programs; Innovative Ability with Learning Base; Entrepreneurial Society; Society of Cultural Pride with Global Sense: and Country of Decent Environment for Living.

Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has identified five strategies which are necessary to make universities fully effective partners for the 21st century. This is a simple face value, but their underlying implications are so substantial that we are really talking about a transformation in our institutions.

First, institutional leaders must work to make engagement so much a priority that it becomes part of the core mission of the university which must be reflected in the full range of activities and in every field of endeavour.

Second, specific engagement plans must be developed and built into everything we do.

Third, interdisciplinary research, teaching, and learning must be encouraged as part of the engagement agenda.

Fourth, incentives must be developed to encourage faculty and student engagement.

Finally, funding streams must support these engagement activities. Partnerships, fees, and internal allocations are all possibilities in developing new partnerships with public agencies and the private sector.

As the president of this great university, and the President of the Rajabhat Universities' Presidents, Dr. Supol's presidency has changed as Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has grown and prospered. It remains, however, the pivotal influence for managing and supporting one of the most distinguished and productive university systems in Rajabhat Universities in Thailand, in Asia and in the world. Now Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University offers many programs leading to doctoral degrees, master's degrees, and bachelor's degrees in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Education, Management, Social Science for Development, Business Administration, and Information science, etc. These programs ensure the students have quick access to information in Thailand and around the world. The university aims to produce graduates with high professional qualifications according to the motto "Successful Assurance at BSRU".

One of his goals as president is to see that the educational experience of BSRU students is as good as we can make it. Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University offers an undergraduate and graduate education second to none, but only because the quality of that education is of paramount concern not only for the President but also for the administrators and the faculty. As well it should be. Much has changed since BSRU burst on the scene in 2004 with 6,000 first-year students. Students remain now as always the lifeblood of any university.

It could easily sound like hyperbole to say that we have entered an era of change that is unprecedented in the history of Rajabhat University. For most of our history, we were omniscient, omnipotent elders who told our customers — our students — what they needed, when they could get it, and what they would pay for it. Those days are rapidly becoming a fond and distant memory. Changes in technology, demographics, competition, and legislative expectations are all coming together to alter the way we operate.

Increasingly close partnerships with the communities, our colleges and universities offer many important opportunities for the future of higher education. The possibilities are as varied as our institutions. They hold in common the chance to make a tangible contribution to enhancing the quality of life through learning. Therefore, the work of the Rajabhat University Commission is distinctly different from any that other former years in higher education administration — for a number of very important reasons.

The Commission is made up of forty university presidents who come from many different parts of Thailand, with very different viewpoints. They share in common some very strong opinions and a passionate willingness to express them. That passion is reflected in the work that has emerged from the Commission.

At the same time, competition between universities and other agencies is becoming ever more intense. The universities find themselves in a changing marketplace because of population growth. As the proportion of the population that wants to attend college also increases, that number will be even higher and those students will be very diverse. Adult and part-time students have been the fastest growing segment of higher education enrolments. A central theme for the Commission is that universities must be fully engaged with communities. This has everything to do with public confidence and support which we can expect to win in the years ahead.

## ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH NEW TEACHING AND LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Higher Education is very essential for building the future and for providing the community with qualified cadres of various specializations. Taking care of the student has always been a priority.

The nature of any relationship with many communities certainly is a critical part of engagement. Through the teaching mission, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has a profound potential

to influence the future of what is now commonly characterized as a learning local society. The key, in the view of the Rajabhat Commission, is to broaden our notion of students to include so-called “Glocal” learners of many different circumstances. It is vital to put students first, to place them at the centre of our learning communities, and to be committed to meeting their needs, wherever they are, whatever they need, and whenever they need it. Institutional flexibility is an essential characteristic in serving a diverse group of learners across the life span and the new technologies are highly supportive of anywhere, anytime learning. The most significant growth area in Thai higher education will be in distance and continuing education.

It is for this reason that Bansomdejchaopraya University created more than 30 Local Campuses whose students are location-bound, including those whose learning endeavours occur in the workplace. As with all IT [information technology] ventures, students will flourish, especially since new economic models are required for this kind of education. Therefore, the University serves 20,000 students, 504 faculty members and staff with 200,000 books, an extensive collection of pamphlets and clippings, over 200 professional journals and other current serials and newspapers. In addition, there are video cassettes, computer databases with CD-ROM, musical databases, internet access, reservation room, conference room, Information Technology Centre and Library Automation System Services.

An engaged university also will focus on the quality of the educational experience, making every effort to prepare learners for the challenges of life in contemporary society. Certainly, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University continues to encourage the development of skills, but these now include the skills of information science and technology needed by all students. The advancement and growth of modern technology is utilized through language laboratories, science laboratories, library and audio-visual aids. Moreover, the students are provided direct learning experiences through special workshop, field trips and visiting other universities.

Given these constraints, and recognizing that in an increasingly complex world the ability to understand, to evaluate, and to respond creatively to challenge and change will influence virtually all aspects of life, this is why the University has to equip students to continue to learn long after they leave us. Equally important, students must be opened their hearts as well as their minds to this task. Intellectual capital is of tremendous importance to the future. Yet so is the extent to which our university promotes character, conscience, citizenship, and social responsibility among those whose lives we touch.

## ENGAGING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

If one characteristic of an engaged university is putting students first, another is putting knowledge to work. Through our research capacity and the expertise of faculty, Rajabhat Universities have tremendous resources for enhancing the quality of life. This has been demonstrated time and again in the role of the local universities in promoting economic development through technology transfer. Furthermore, Rajabhat Universities’ role is promoting human development and also has contributed much to the health and well-being of people throughout the life span. Yet the needs of society remain great: the Rajabhat Commission has identified on its list of potential areas for university engagement the many issues related to education and the economy; agriculture and food; rural Thailand, urban revitalization, and community development; health care; children, youth, and families; and the environment and natural resources. There are others that could be added as well.

The university has to be open to learning from and with our collaborators in the community. Engagement is really a two-way street that should impact the university as much as it impacts our partners. The purpose of engagement is not to provide the university’s superior expertise to the community, but to encourage joint academic-community definitions of problems, solutions, and success. (Magrath, 2000).

In the view of Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University Commission, involving students in meaningful research, leading in the academic and social areas of the surrounding community and integrating the community into the academic experiences of our students are promising

approaches. The belief is that research opportunities give students important experience in problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and communication — all useful lifetime skills.

With the significant collaborative community development and meaningful research as above mentioned, TRENDS-Model or The Academic Delivery System by Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University's Leader—Professor Dr. Supol Wuthisen is a fruitful educational model. It is a discipline model where the disciplines are the context for conveying the local cultural heritage, for posing the questions that have perplexed humankind over the ages, for engendering new questions, and for teaching the methods of disciplinary inquiry. Students interact with the best ideas and minds, both historical and contemporary, and, both local and international. On the other hand, the TRENDS-model has a more behaviourist starting point focusing on the competencies that the students need and the most efficient and effective ways to develop these outcomes in the student. This illustrates the difference between the goals of Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University or Rajabhat Universities and other University Institutes.

Moreover, the University emphasizes the students' responsibilities to their community by participating in many projects such as teaching-aid services, rural area voluntary development, and rural public library construction. To conserve and disseminate the community's arts and culture, the University has established two elegant museums. They are the Musical Museum and Somdejchaopraya Borommaha Srisuriyawongse Museum. The BSRU Thai dance and Thai musical band are always performed in community for collaborative charity.

With relation to internships, practicums, and service learning opportunities, the University makes the context for learning real-life situations in businesses, organizations, and communities. These experiences have many rewards. For students, they provide the impetus for critical reflection, expand horizons, and encourage responsibility and good citizenship - be it in the workplace or in the community. For the organizations involved, there is work of value being done, often on a volunteer basis. The University benefits as well from the good will and partnerships such projects and activities foster.

#### ENGAGING DIVERSITY: BRIDGING BOUNDARIES IN INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Professor Dr. Supol Wuthisen's arrival at Bansomdejchopraya Rajabhat University comes at a significant time in the University's history. The institution, with a firmly established reputation for being student-centred and being committed to offering a high-quality and "engaged" education, has set as its goal a significant, all-encompassing transformation. It is in the process of becoming a "world-local" university. This implies becoming significantly more competitive on a broad front of disciplines as a centre of undergraduate and graduate teaching and learning, and as a centre of research at national and international levels.

A dedicated team within the University - administrators, Trustees, faculty, staff and students - has made substantial progress in its transformation. As the President and his staff work to broaden and deepen this transformation, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has the opportunity to take a lead role among Rajabhat universities to collectively address the emerging challenges facing our society. Given the complexity of the world in which Thais must operate, society requires a much higher proportion of its citizenry than ever before to have a university-level education, with an increasing need for post-graduate level degrees, including many PhDs in a broad spectrum of areas.

Professor Dr. Supol has made the fruitful cooperation held between Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University and other neighbouring universities, particularly the Edith Cowan University. Joint academic cooperation and human resources are held between the two Universities. The Presidents and Rectors of Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University and the Edith Cowan University are urged to activate and stimulate all forms of cooperation between the two Universities. The two sides should facilitate and back the exchange of professors and students' visits.



In addition to the fruitful co-operation held with Edith Cowan University, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has signed cooperation agreements with Universities throughout Asia Pacific, Indo China, Europe and beyond, especially in Thailand's neighbours as follows:

- The Kingdom of Cambodia: Chamroeun University, University of Cambodia,
- Vietnam: Hanoi University of Education, Hochiminh City University of Pedagogy, Quangbin Teacher Training College
- The Philippines: University of the Philippines.
- England: University of Northumbria at Newcastle
- Australia: Edith Cowan University, University of Queensland, University of Sydney
- Japan: Aichi University of Education, Kyoto University of Education
- The People's Republic of China: Yunnan University, Chongqing University, Habin Engineering University, Tianjin Normal University
- Taiwan: National Taiwan Normal University, Providence University etc.

Rajabhat universities, which are located in every province in Thailand, must increasingly internationalize their curriculum, exchange programs, their student recruitment, research endeavours, and many of their core activities. Rajabhat universities must become the test-bed and practice-field for Thailand and Thai students who will live and work in a highly socially and culturally diverse and internationalized environment. Rajabhat universities must strengthen their ties with their regional communities on many fronts. They should act as windows for their regions into the emerging world beyond the immediate environs - provincially, nationally, internationally - a world in which these local regions must place themselves (again, with the universities' active participation) strategically, economically, socially and culturally. It is apparent that Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University has already chosen to become a university that will play an important role on many of the aforementioned fronts. Indeed, BSRU has the opportunity to become a model in many respects of a new type of university engagement in society as it continues to redefine and strengthen its roles in undergraduate and graduate education and in research. The President is working with the community and external stakeholders to realize our full potential as we fulfil our mandate to better the lives of not only those who come to university but also to better society.

Professor Dr. Supol explained that similar attention is given to the teaching cadres, which are expected to benefit a lot from the issuing of a new university regulation. The University is keen to update and enhance the skills of university professors. Every faculty has a budget of its own and every rector must do his best to send his people on scholarships abroad. This necessitates upon the teaching cadres to open to the world and have contacts with other professors and universities abroad. Every doctor, for example, should constantly keep abreast of what's new in the world of medicine, and all kinds of relevant medical symposia and exhibitions held worldwide along with the possibility of participating in them. Usually, the University backs such participation if the candidate meets certain provisions.

Internationalization is the critical means whereby the quality of our academic learning, discovery, and engagement can be enhanced, broadened, and enlivened. When we integrate international perspectives, experience, and discovery into our institutions, it expands our capacity to address the challenges of the new century and the needs of the world. It enables us better to serve our students, our communities, our nation, and the academy.

1. For students - internationalization helps them to develop the global critical thinking essential to contribute as citizens of the world and compete in the international marketplace.
2. For communities - internationalization links them to the world, expanding opportunities for university service and engagement while also enhancing their global competitiveness.
3. For students - internationalization helps them to develop the global critical thinking essential to contribute as citizens of the world and compete in the international marketplace.
4. For communities - internationalization links them to the world, expanding opportunities for university service and engagement while also enhancing their global competitiveness.
5. For research enhancement - internationalization also enhances the research activities of our colleges and universities. In addition to attracting the best of the world's students and

researchers, internationalization encourages open inquiry and collaboration. Increasingly, the best research now occurs in the context of global partnerships.

## CONCLUSION

Creating the global university of the future cannot be accomplished without deep presidential commitment. That is because internationalizing the campus involves enlarging the mission, shifting the academic culture, broadening perspectives, making new connections, getting everyone involved, and changing the way things get done. Those tasks land squarely at the door to the president's office. If we are to redefine higher education, to create the new, global university, it will require leaders who are willing to commit to the "3 A's of Leadership" - articulate, advocate, and act. Articulate - A clear and compelling vision for a global university within the unique context and heritage of each individual institution. Advocate - The importance of internationalization, on campus and off. Finally, Act, by implementing specific action strategies that will advance the vision and hold the institution accountable for transformation.

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