Albion College Pledges Job Help to Future Grads

In these days of recession-inspired innovation, more colleges are getting into the guarantee business. At Albion College in Michigan, administrators recently decided that they must respond—and renewed—the 125-year-old Liberal Arts college for this era of economic uncertainty.

This spring the college unveiled the “Albion Advantage,” a plan for helping all students develop career goals. It comes with a pledge: Albion will help graduates who struggle to fulfill those goals, by finding them internships or by offering them a free semester of non-credit study.

Earlier this year, the University of Maine at Farmington introduced “Farmington in Four,” a pledge that all students will get their degrees in four years or their remaining courses will be free. And recently, Lansing Community College in Michigan announced a money-back guarantee to students who do not find a full-time job within a year of completing certain programs.

As marketing strategies go, such assurances are both clever and timely. They acknowledge that choosing a college—or choosing to go to college—at all—typically involves some degree of doubt about the future, not to mention financial strains.

That’s especially true in Michigan, where the job market has been hit hard by the recession. The unemployment rate in the state is currently 9.6%, the highest in the nation.

Shaping SUNY Into a Whole Greater Than Its Parts

By Eric Kelderman

Nancy L. Zimpher admits to being infected with self-help books, especially those about corporate leadership. As chancellor of the State University of New York, she may need all the help she can get as she steers her own management theories in an effort to bolster the image and quality of the nation’s largest system of public higher education.

During the past decade, SUNY has been plagued by frequent turnover in leadership and hampered by limited cooperation among the system’s 64 campuses, which are mired in competition for scarce resources and hamstrung by state regulations.

Like several previous chancellors, Ms. Zimpher has an ambitious goal: to unite the system’s two-year colleges, regional universities, and major research institutions around a common set of goals. A strategic plan she unveiled this month seeks to redefine the role of the system, coordinate the focus of its campuses, and raise its profile both in New York and across the nation. While the system’s largest universities have little incentive to go along with the

Paleontology’s No. 2 Expert

By Don Troop

If you want to make Jim L. Mead happy, give him a pile of dung.

The paleontologist and geoscience chairman here at East Tennessee State University owns what he says is probably the world’s most diverse collection of animal droppings. He has some 13,000 amphibians, mammals, and reptile skeletons in his closet, but it is his 900-piece archive of scat from extinct and modern animals that has propelled Mr. Mead’s reputation beyond academia. Or down the toilet, depending on how you look at it.

Popular Science singled him out this month as one of the 10 worst jobs in science, and Mr. Mead, whose expertise is in lizard skeletons, gamely played along. While he has no doubt about the scientific value of his work, he is acutely aware of the humor in, say, prompting a deer to give what your doctor euphemistically refers to as a stool sample. Usually when you scare them and get them running, Mr. Mead says, they defecate.

A moist sample like that is placed in a convection oven “to dry the pizzazz” as Mr. Mead puts it. Fossilized dung, or coprolite, has been dehydrated naturally in a dry cave or it would have disappeared long ago.

Strikes in DNA extraction have raised the scientific value of organic collections like Mr. Mead’s. When he shows a visitor a baseball-size hump produced 12,000 years ago by a now-extinct Shasta ground sloth, a sense of awe hangs in the air, along with the earthly aroma of the Pleistocene.

Like a well-aged wine, ice-age excrement gives off a smooth scent that is not unpleasant to the nose. Lucky for Mr. Mead. When he kisses his partner after a long day spent digging dung from a cave.

This week’s news briefing: Page A3 • 243 job opportunities: Page A42
In Latin America, Joint Degree Programs and Exchanges are Increasingly Common

Continued From Page A1

Zealand, the United States, and the State of California, which include language training and special visas for Chilean students and researchers. The country’s goal is to finance 30,000 graduate students by 2018, the 200th anniversary of Chile’s independence from Spain.

“These are programs that focus on boosting the competitiveness of Chile,” says Francisco Macrory, executive director of the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration, or Conaceh, which is based at the University of Arizona.

He notes that Chile’s scholarship program gives preference to students pursuing subjects relevant to the Chilean economy, like engineering, agriculture, health, and environmental sciences. In addition, the country’s export-promotion agency, ProChile, recently included institutions of higher education among the “products” it markets abroad.

This week, university presidents and administrators from throughout the Americas are gathering in Houston to discuss ways to expand their international partnerships. The conference, sponsored by Conaceh, will focus on consortium building as a way to surmount the global economic crisis. New models include research collaborations among institutions and joint graduate programs in areas like business, law, and accounting.

The conference will also examine obstacles to internationalization in the Americas—and there are many. Barriers include the suffering bureaucracy at public universities in Latin America, which conduct the vast majority of the academic research in those countries; the poor quality of most private and many public universities in the region; the absence of a common credit system throughout the Americas; and the shortage of scholarships for Latin American students to go abroad.

NO COMMON LANGUAGE

Most notable, though, is the lack of foreign-language skills on both sides of the Río Grande. “In Mexico, the level of foreign-language teaching is horrendous,” says Sylvie Dávila, a Mexico-based higher-education expert and a member of a Mexico task force on education quality. “If we don’t address the problem of language instruction starting in elementary school, or at least from the middle-school level, we’re never going to achieve a level of mobility necessary for internationalization.”

In 2006 the Mexican government announced plans to introduce English-language instruction starting in kindergarten. But the government must first overcome the severe shortage of qualified language teachers—a common problem throughout Latin America.

In Chile, there are not enough qualified English speakers to take advantage of spots in U.S. graduate programs, says Jorge Rojas, a Chilean native who is director of the Chile-California partnership program at the University of California at Davis. He notes that it will take years before a Chilean government language-immersion campaign pays off.

The program, known as Lenguas Del Día, began in 2005 with intensive training in English as a second language for instructors in public and private schools nationwide, as well as exchange programs for students.

The government has since added French, German, and Mandarin Chinese to the offerings, in hopes of further preparing its students for the globalized workplace.

Another challenge is the lack of a regional driver for internationalization, such as the European Union’s Bologna Accord. The European Union is working with Latin American universities—including Michigan State University, the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire, and the University of Texas at Austin—to help them develop a common credit system.

The Federal University of Latin American Integration, or Unila, is a step in that direction. The university, which opened in August in the Brazilian state of Paraná, near the border with Argentina and Paraguay, plans to eventually admit 10,000 students and hire 500 professors from throughout the region.

LIMITED ACTIVITY

However, it may be years before scholars outside Latin America—and particularly from the United States—will feel comfortable venturing there.
States—view the region as an attractive option, administrators say.

"Europe has always been much more open" to academic exchange with Latin America, says Maria Alasina, director of international affairs at the private Catholic University of Chile.

Catholic University enrolls among the largest number of foreign-exchange students of any Latin American university—some 1,300 a year, half of them from the United States. It also offers three joint graduate programs with universities in the United States.

However, Ms. Alasina says, forging partnerships with American institutions "has always been much more difficult."

Still, there are some notable exceptions.

In 2008, California's University of the Pacific became the first American college to sign a student- and faculty-exchange agreement with the University of Chile and the Caribbean, the region's largest association of higher-education institutions. The pact gives Pacific access to about 350 member universities in 20 countries, according to the university's Web site.

In addition, at least four other American universities—Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma State, and Kentucky—have dedicated offices for Latin America, Mr. Marmolino says.

New York's LaGuardia Community College is providing technical assistance for a big project in the region. Starting in late April, Chile will open its first two-year college, with campuses in Santiago and in the northern mining city of Antofagasta.

The program offers degrees in areas such as civil engineering, computer science, and accounting.

**Equal Partners**

The new collaborations reflect a major change in the way U.S. universities are viewing the top public and private universities in Latin America: They no longer treat them as beneficiaries of their expertise, but rather as equal partners in mutually advantageous relationships.

"We're looking at peer institutions, with the same level of research and educational programs," says Joel Harrington, associate provost for global strategy at Vanderbilt University.

He recently joined a high-level delegation to Catholic University of Chile to explore adding the institution to an elite group of research-based "strategic partners," whose members include Fudan University, in Shanghai, and the Universities of Cape Town, Melbourne, and Sao Paulo.

"If you really care interested in a long-term, sustainable relationship, it has to be founded on mutual respect and a long-term commitment," says Mr. Harrington.

Ms. Bachelet, Chile's first female president, emphasized the new, equal footing between American and Latin American universities while signing several research agreements with the State of California and the Universi-ty of California system in 2008. "In contrast to the 1990s and 1990s, we have not come here to ask for aid," she told a packed auditorium at the University of California at Berkeley. "We have come to form an association between Chile and California as part of a new relationship."

Already, the number of Davis researchers traveling to Chile each year has jumped from five to 20, and the number of Chilean graduate students studying in California has multiplied from three to 15, says Mr. Rojas. The faculty there will be involved in helping Chile develop a half-dozen new agricultural and environmental research centers, he said.

The University of Colorado at Boulder is also teaming up with Catholic University to offer a joint Ph.D. program in engineering, a field whose rigid curriculum has traditionally deterred students from going abroad.

Meanwhile, American University's Washington College of Law is offering a joint master's program in international contract and business law at the public University of Chile, also in Santiago. The program's directors are also exploring the possibility of adding a second track for American students that would include a focus on Latin American law.

"Every year, there is more interest among American attorneys in getting trained in foreign law," says Macarena Saenz, who coordinates the five-year-old program from Washington. "That's something that you really didn't see 20, 30 years ago, where attorneys were really looking within the country and seeing how they would get jobs. Today they see the likelihood of having foreign clients is pretty high, and the likelihood of having to travel is pretty high."

**Getting Ahead**

That same logic is fueling a growth in dual-degree programs...
Continued From Preceding Page

in Mexico, particularly in the capital, which so far remains removed from the drug violence. The private Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico, in Mexico City, has four joint master’s programs, including one in international accounting with Florida International University.

At an average of $25,000 for a two-year degree, the programs are pricey by Latin American standards. But for the 19 students enrolled in the Florida program, the opportunity to earn degrees in two countries, as well as to prepare for the U.S. Certified Public Accountant license, is worth the cost. The program also teaches students about the new international accounting standards, which may become universal within a few years.

“I was very impressed that they were teaching us all three systems,” says Irina Nikolaeva, a Russian student who holds an accounting degree from Northeastern Illinois University, in Chicago. “That’s the basic idea of globalization, that you learn how the whole world works.”

Ms. Nikolaeva, who works as an accountant for the international firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, said the dual degree would help her get ahead in her job. “Of course people who know not only English, but also different accounting systems, will get promotions and higher salaries,” she said.

Humberto Ahuatzin, another student, commutes two hours to the program from the city of Puebla. He says he hopes to apply his new knowledge of North American accounting methods to help professionalize Mexican companies. “In Mexico, we’re working to have a modern accounting language, but we have illiterate companies,” he says. “That’s no way to get ahead as a country.”

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Despite the appeal of such dual-degree programs, getting them off the ground is not easy.

In 2007, Oklahoma State University began offering 23 different joint master’s degrees with the private Popular Autonomous University of Puebla, a business and accounting school two hours north of Mexico City.

In theory, the program has the added draw of providing students with a year in Oklahoma. (Most such programs in Latin America send students abroad for several weeks, if at all.) However, so far only four students have enrolled and two have already graduated, says Maria Guadalupe Fabregas, who directs the programs from an office at Oklahoma State.

“It’s always hard making a name for yourself,” she says. Still, there are signs of increased interest in such programs, and in academic exchange in the region in general. Of the 60 colleges and study-abroad providers in the United States that responded to a survey by Eastern Illinois University in 2009, 64 percent reported an increase in student participation in Latin America over the previous academic year.

More than half responded that the relatively low cost of studying in Latin America and the ease of access to universities in the region were the main motivating factors.

Yet the Latin American region as a whole accounts for only 15 percent of foreign students in the United States, according to the Institute of International Education.

“The situation in Latin America is very heterogeneous,” says Ms. Diouf, the UNESCO task-force member. Only four countries in the region have increased the rate of their student mobility beyond their growth in enrollments, she says, citing a recent figures from the U.N. agency. Her conclusion: While there are more exchange programs cropping up every day in Latin America, the region “has yet to put academic mobility at the center of its higher-education agenda.”