



GlobalPDX Podcast

Season 2 Episode 5 Transcript

With Dennis Galvan

Avery Waxman

Hello, and welcome to the [GlobalPDX](#) podcast. I'm Avery Waxman, Member of the GlobalPDX Advisory Board, and Vice President of Communications for [Navitas](#), an organization that partners with public universities all around the world to help them advance their Internationalization goals.

In today's GlobalPDX *Speaking Change* podcast I'm taking over the program temporarily from Andrea to interview a very special guest: Dennis Galvan. Dennis is the Dean and Vice Provost for Global Engagement and also a professor of Political Science and Global Studies at the University of Oregon. Dennis' research centers on rural Senegal where he has spent more than 30 years studying how locals resist, respond to, and adapt to various enthusiastic Western efforts to "help them" become developed (you can't see the air quotes but they were there)! He's worked on related topics in Central Java, Indonesia as well, focusing on trust between ethnic and religious groups. At U of O Dennis oversees study abroad, international student services, International research centers, Global Partnerships, and campus internationalisation. And if that's not enough, this year he's also UofOs *Vice Provost for strategic initiatives*, which we're going to talk about a little bit today. So as a proud Duck myself, and a fellow practitioner in the field of global higher ed, I'm super excited to be talking with Dennis today. Dennis, thank you so much for being here, and welcome to the GlobalPDX Podcast!

Dennis

Thank you Avery, it is a pleasure to be here, and the pleasure to be with the GlobalPDX podcast listeners.

Avery

So let's get the obligatory COVID-related question out of the way first: going to college obviously should (and for most students really does) provide a unique opportunity to be exposed to different perspectives, diversity of thought. Living and learning with International students on campus is a really big piece that contributes to that. But COVID,



as we all know, stopped international student mobility in its tracks. Students couldn't get here, couldn't get visas, or for very valid reasons (in the middle of a global pandemic) they chose not to come. So in a small, fairly homogeneous City like Eugene, and at a University like U of O, at least according to fall 2020 data: more than half of the students there are from Oregon. And only about 6% (back and fall 2020) are International. So you know it is not as perhaps diverse as some other large state institutions. Boy, we need those international student perspectives! Both in the classroom and in the community, as well as sort of from an economic point of view. So with that really long preamble, can you talk to us a bit about how UofO has been impacted by student mobility coming to a standstill, and how are you guys adapting to this reality?

Dennis

That's a great question Avery, and it is certainly a Uof O question, a State of Oregon question, and I think also a national question, to have the flow of international students all of a sudden stop. And quite frankly when March 2020 (when that moment 2 years ago) hit we had lots of international students who immediately went home and stayed home for a long long time. So a couple of things about that: you're absolutely right that for us the diversity on campus, diversity of perspective, national origin, culture, language, ethnicity, race, religion, (wow International students are really really important). We are doing surprisingly well as a University on domestic diversity (our student population is up above 20 (between 20 and 25 per cent) U.S. minority students which is awesome). But we were 13% International students in about 2016, and the number has gone down a lot. It started to go down before the pandemic, it started to go down a little bit before the Trump Administration, certainly hostility to immigrants, immigration barriers didn't help at all.

So a couple of things: immediately in the pandemic one of the things that became a big concern for us was the retention of international students. To make sure that our International students (particularly those about 500-600-700 I believe, who were in their home country) had a strong connection to the University of Oregon. And many of them were taking synchronous online classes (Zoom classes) in the middle of the night in their time zone. So we built a program we called *No Visa Needed* additions to enrollment and this included in person internships that they could do in Beijing and Shanghai if they were in China. It included a virtual internships for credit, virtual internships are a great too because it enables people to do what we are doing right now: conduct our professional lives over Zoom through remote technology. And virtual internships are career enhancing, and they are skill developing. We offered a program of remote Homestay, we called it "English around the world" where an international student would get a language buddy in Eugene to practice their English with (usually a peer). We have a study abroad site in London so we



got people from London to be language tutors, and they were speaking The Queen's English (like *the right* English), so that was great. They can hear English with a British accent and Oregon accent (of course we Oregonians don't have an accent...). And then for some students we were able to get an alumni career coach (typically based in Hong Kong or Singapore). What's nice about that is that's English too, but it's yet another version of global English. And we also had, maybe the most important thing we did, was we worked with an alumna based in Shanghai (a former Chinese student) to become a *concierge advisor* in their own time zone. For many students in the time zone where they were, somebody they could go to (or their parents could go to) to help solve a problem: like my Zoom class isn't being recorded, how do I get to the professor to ask them to record it?" So a lot of adaptations. And now as we look at late pandemic, maybe entering the endemic phase, we certainly see students coming back to campus: I'm looking out my window at students walking down 13th Avenue right now (thankfully I still see a large number of them masked which is great). International students are eager to come back. The fact that the Biden Administration removed the rule that said if you were coming from China you had to spend two weeks in another country is a big deal for us.

Avery

Absolutely.

Dennis

And international enrollment is going to grow back at the University of Oregon. It may never be quite so centered on China because the Chinese economy has changed. So as we build new academic programs in sport and wellness, in environment and climate change, in data science, some of these are already new undergraduate degree programs like data science. There will be a new one in biomedical engineering in the night campus, there will be new programs in climate change studies in sport and Wellness. I think we will be positioned to do a New generation of international student recruitment to come to the University of Oregon, because we're the top place and some of those areas (and in addition to being a welcoming, friendly, beautiful campus right on the West Coast easy flight from East Asia).

Avery

So many great examples of adaptations. Could you even imagine 2-3 years ago that you would have just spent 2 to 3 minutes enumerating all of the different ways from horse delivery to curriculum and kind of everything in between that you would have launched, with probably a minimum planning and whatever resources you had in the moment?



Dennis

Absolutely not, I can't imagine. But in a way, if you step back a little bit from the pandemic and you look at the 10 year - 20 year view, U.S. higher education was already going to face a bit of a challenge as more universities become better. More university seats in China, better universities every year, better options in China. As Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK compete for the same students who want to go to an English-speaking country. So in some ways the pandemic accelerated some processes that were happening more slowly and the adaptations (our adaptations) sped up in a way that's pretty saultory. We needed to get on our game on this because the changes were moving already. And I think indicative of that is that the peak Chinese enrollment at the U of O was in 2016 and in the U.S. was a year or two after that.

Avery

So we are going to get to this concept of pent-up demand in a few minutes. I'm also going to ask you to weigh in on how you think the U.S. (and U of O specifically) are going to be able to compete with other Primary English-speaking countries that International students consider when they're looking for study abroad opportunities. But before we get to that, we talked at the top about the amazing value that international students bring to our campuses, into our community. The flip side of that of course is when our own students study abroad, right? Their worldview literally and figuratively gets broadened when they leave the beautiful, wonderful state of Oregon and go live, learn alongside students from all around the world to live with a host family. Can anything ever replace a semester abroad, backpacking after college, teaching abroad, or joining the Peace Corps after graduation? What is going to be the impact if these types of opportunities and these possible career paths become less popular or less accessible?

Dennis

Yes, this is a concern as well, and I think the short answer is: nothing really does replace the backpacking after you graduate. The immersive study abroad. Working in a firm or an agency or an NGO overseas. The face-to-face, all senses (including senses you didn't know you had) activated by the new cultural experience (sights and smells feels tingles). Nothing will ever really replace that but two thoughts about it:

1. Coming out of the pandemic I think we can now, hopefully, think of that kind of engagement with the world where it really affects you, it really touches your heart, and you are transformed, in a more gradual or incremental way. At the peak of that graduated scale, at the high end, is always going to be the



immersive experience we're talking about. But can we imagine a situation where students are using remote contact and project-based learning in their classes on energy and decarbonization with students from the National University of Singapore, or from **Wausau University**, or from King Abdullah University of Science and Technology. And they spend half a term on a project with them. That is a cool way to get an incremental bit of the deep value of travel and immersive experience without traveling. And I don't think of it as a substitute, I think of it as a kind of *life path* that hopefully what that does (that classroom experience, or that remote home stay, or the remote virtual internship) whets the appetite to get more and more. I think that that's what I see with students.

2. Having said that, the thing we really want to watch out for is: if travel is a more rare opportunity. What we don't want to see is for the population of people who benefit from those travel-based educational experiences to become less diverse, less inclusive. I think in the study abroad field we have been fighting for decades to overcome the history. There is a certain history of this field as kind of (to be a little blunt) white middle-class finishing school or upper middle class finishing school. That rich white young men and women go to Europe to polish off their education and to become more sophisticated. I think that that was true probably before I was born (and I was born in the pleistocene) so a long time ago that was how study abroad was. The field has been working incredibly hard to make sure that is not what it is and to include students of color and students from families of modest means, and first generation students, and Rural students. And that is certainly our mission at the University of Oregon. It's just that if travel becomes more rare we really need to double-down on access scholarships to make sure that ... We have many students at the University of Oregon who have never had a passport. We have a program we call the *Passport Program* where they apply and we buy them a passport. And it's \$180-\$ hundred bucks for a passport but it's not the cost and (sometimes it is the cost) but it's also the psychological barrier. If that's not something that was done in your family, we want to make sure that you also have that password in hand and start thinking about the opportunity.

So I think the incremental steps in remote learning can't be the end point for students of color, and it's only the rich white kids who then get on the plane.



Avery

I think I need to take a break from recording and bookmark direct Mike University of Oregon alumni giving dollars in that direction. So let's go back to the classroom. COVID obviously changed how you teach, you gave so many examples earlier in our conversation. Remote delivery was just sort of the least of it. But would you say it also changed *what you teach*?

Dennis

Yeah, I think that's a work-in-progress. but clearly what I see on this campus is that we were already following strong student demand for ... here actually interestingly it was Global Health was the academic program that we built first. But beneath *Global Health* is just *public health*. Our sister universities in Corvallis, Oregon State, Portland State, have good public health programs, we need one too. Students wanted it. 25% of incoming University of Oregon students say they want to work in the Health Professions in some way. And what emerged organically here is a strong well enrolled Global Health minor actually before the pandemic. And faculty in many many fields (in economics, and political science, and history, and in the College of Education, College of design, all across campus) are thinking about what they do AND questions of health (and health inequities, and health administration, and healthy economics). So there was an organic move in that direction. And then with the pandemic you can see so many faculty adjusting their courses really in Spring 2020, on a dime, adjusting their courses to be about the pandemic. And they already were tooled up in a certain way, but it's a pretty impressive move that way. So yes definitely a shift in educational Focus for the public health issues really broadly understood. We also stood up a student training program for students to break quickly get certified through Lane County Public Health and Oregon Health Authority as contact tracers (we call it the "Corona Corps" still running contact tracing case management case investigation we basically invented a new pipe line towards the workforce of students ready to be public health workers which is completely awesome. And the students are so empowered to be a part of that kind of work. So there's that shift.

And I think there's also this way that the pandemic has forced us to be Global in a real sense, in the deeper sense of the word. The easier sense of the word is: to be curious about the other, and to love travel, and discovery. Which is great. I come from that, you come from that Avery, many of our listeners come from that too. To be Global in the deeper sense is: to problematize what's going on here in the U.S. and Oregon in Lane County in the context of what's coming or going to the rest of the world, or how we are realitive/compared to the rest of the world. So I think the pandemic, just to get a simple example: we really believe in this country that the Democratic free market model that



organizes our society is *a good model*. Many people believe that (we may have debates about that). We generally believe that having a single ruler with total control and no limits on that person's time in power isn't a good model. But you look at the Chinese example in the pandemic and the way that the Chinese, the way Xi Jinping and the Chinese government are able to promote their ability to contain the pandemic and we're doing this podcast during the Beijing Olympics! And it's an amazing PR moment to show that they got their act together. And the message within China is: be wary about the West cuz they're in chaos, and it's a cesspool of virus. So I think from an educational point of view that's a great topic that we're taking on: understanding what the pandemic does to position how we think of ourselves, and how we think of the United States in contrast to the rest of the world.

Avery

So let's talk, at long last, about this notion of pent-up demand. At Navitas where I work we have done some pretty interesting research over the last 18 months about what the road to recovery looks like in international education (and proposed some theories around that different paths that road could take). You know one of the really simple and basic indicators that we've looked at is the issuance of student visas. Visas for the U.S. are almost back to 2019 levels which is incredibly encouraging to say the least. It doesn't necessarily mean every Visa holding student is going to come, but it is certainly a predictor. And you know that even with the lack of mobility of students from China, which is really actually quite phenomenal. We're seeing that up-tick student visas for the U.S. but so is Canada, so is the UK, and Australia just reopened. So as borders reopen across the world, universities again embrace students on their campuses. And international student mobility really resumes, how do you think the U.S. (and U of O particularly) will fare compared to these other countries that are, you know, equally appealing and sometimes appealing for other reasons to international students?

Dennis

I think we have an unusual mix of elements in our offering in U.S. higher education. And 50-60 years ago the competition wasn't so tough. Now it's much tougher, and we're coasting on *what was* (what was and still is) valuable. So I think the challenge now is not that the value proposition is all that different. I think we have a value proposition in U.S. higher education where we do things a little differently than the Canadians and the Australians and the Kiwis and the Brits do. My son was at University of British Columbia and I was amazed to see this difference for him as a first-year student. So our value proposition is still strong, but we have to tell the story in a much more intentional, more creative, more overt



way. And so what I would say the value proposition of U.S. higher education is: we kind of mix three things that the three ingredients that we mix not everybody else has these ingredients.

1. We still do liberal arts education. And if you're in a three-year British style system *you're tracked*. You're picking what you're doing. Even in Canada you're picking your school/college and even Department of major, *early*. What's great about a true liberal arts education is this exploratory phase. And that exploratory phase lets you actually discover "Discovery". Lets you learn *what discovery is* and lets you understand your career goal, and personal passion, and major are tricky to align and it is developmental: it takes time. You have to discover yourself in order to figure that out. So other systems don't give us much room to do that. It makes our system kind of chaotic and long, but it's still a value.
2. The residential experience, the second piece. The sort of crazy ferment of our residential Campus Life (dorms, and football games, and Greek system parties). There's a certain kind of productive chaos in the residential life experience. And my residential life colleagues would want me to say, "It's actually organized chaos"! But from a student point of view: it's exciting. It's exciting to come to a residential campus and be with other people your age and discover. And it's partly outside of the classroom.
3. And then the third piece is *optional practical training, career readiness*. We need to do more to make sure that International students understand that this is still a great place to start a job and a family. That's that's the one that we don't control so much, but we still can do this as a country. We just have to fix our problem with the terrible virus of xenophobia. We have to understand that this is what has made the country great for generations and can continue to do so: is to give talented eager hard-working students the chance to stay here, build their careers and contribute to our economy in Oregon and around the country. We can do this.

And if you put those three ingredients together, and you really market them, and are overt about them: a rich exploratory education based on discovery, a residential life experience, and a job path. Put those together and there's no reason to go to Canada.

Avery

So I want to come back to your comments about the value of a liberal arts education. If you are a parent (could be a parent in China, could be a parent anywhere), and you know it's not unusual for this generation of international students to be the first



from their family who will study abroad they need to actually be the first in their family (first gen) college students. You don't have to convince me of the value of a liberal arts education and you don't have to convince your parents who have experienced that themselves. But to someone who is looking at spending a full fee-paying tuition x 4 years at an institution and their concerns that that first year is going to be, as you put it, “exploratory”. As opposed to focused and preparing their son or daughter for a particular academic track that is going to lead to a particular job upon graduation. How do we better present the value proposition of a liberal arts education, when there are plenty of very valid arguments for getting into a pre-professional track, staying there, finishing in 4 years, and having a very defined career path from there?

Dennis

It's a great question Avery. As a first generation myself who had the tremendous good fortune to go to Stanford on an IBM scholarship (my dad worked for IBM), I didn't know what I was experiencing at Stanford at a place that de-emphasizes major selection (that really discourages major selection). I didn't know what was happening and I benefited so much from it.

So the thing about this *exploratory liberal arts education* path, a couple things: what it's really doing is giving a young mind the opportunity to find the topic area, the discipline (whether its history, or its English writing composition, or its science) it's experimentation. Where their ability to analyze big streams of data and think critically about them and write well about them, and present effectively, and analyze crisply, you gotta find where you're going to do that well. Cuz doing that well is more important than the degree. The degree in accounting, or the degree in international studies is going to have some value the year you graduate, and its value will diminish every year of the remaining 35-40-50 years of your career. Because it immediately starts to get stale and out-of-date. What doesn't get stale and out of date is your fundamental ability to do more than an AI algorithm can do. To see pattern, analyze data, to make connection in your culture, across cultures, in your time, across history. And then communicate really effectively (in writing, and in presentation, and have graphic design, and GIS skills (Geographic Information Skills) to be an even better communicator and a better synthesizer of information). The data show that 15 years after getting a liberal arts degree (the English degree) 15 to 20 years your salary exceeds those with a bachelor's degree in something more applied. So the data support the fact that people who will become managers, and people who will get paid well, are people who had this foundational experience.

The last point I would say is “mismatch”. There is a tremendous waste that comes when a student comes into a university feeling like the right path I don't know is



engineering, or the right path is lab research and biology, or the right path is architectural design, and they're not good at it! They're just not skilled, they're not suited for it. If you don't allow the 18 year old to have the *discovery moment*, the exploratory moment you're going to create wasteful mismatches and that person's career is going to be less impactful. Out in the economy, in the pocketbook, and in the soul they're going to be unhappy. And I think those things actually can go together: you can be happy and make money and make a difference in the world if you find the right fit. So that's why a liberal arts education is so much more value. Especially in a mid-12st-century where AI is going to replace many of our jobs. We don't need people coming out with me or technical skills. We need the skills of the mind, and of creativity, and a constant re-training, and constant inquiry. And those are liberal arts skills.

Avery

So earlier in our chat you really gave us a sense of your perspective on pent-up demand in terms of in-bound students (so International students coming from all over the world to study in Eugene and obviously a campuses across the United States). I'm curious what your thoughts are around pent-up demand from an *outbound* study abroad point of view, and just to sort of close out the conversation: what does all of this mean for UofO's International engagement as a move forward?

Dennis

I'm so glad you asked that Avery because we were all really worried about outbound study abroad in Spring of 2020. We had seven or eight hundred students who were ready (you know some who had bought plane tickets) for summer 2020 programs, and we went through a year (2020-2021) where we actually did send some students abroad, but it was in very controlled ways. And we did a lot of our own risk assessment and our own counting of you know number of tests per capita, and infection rates, and hospital bed utilization. So we've built a pretty good system for being able to send students. Now here we are: February 2022, and summer 22 will be the biggest summer I think we've had (bigger than summer 19). If we compare applications open, completed, at the various stages today with where they were two years ago I believe we are at 120% of '19.

So what this says to me (as we know about this campus) lots of students come here because they like the study abroad options which are pretty enormous. Lots of students wish they could have gone in the last two summers, and are now raring to go. And the other thing going to your last question that I think is really *really* interesting is: in some ways for many of us, what the pandemic brought is that the world is a dangerous place.



There are pandemics, they come from other places and they spread. The Omicron variant spread from apparently South Africa to the US in 6 weeks or so. *And yet* in a world that is arguably empirically more dangerous, our students are more engaged. Our students are more ready to go. What I take as great inspiration for UofOs internationalisation is this is a generation of students that's not crouching in fear from what the pandemic means. Rather I think it's a generation that's curious and eager to engage, and they understand that their future, their careers, go through being connected to the rest of the world. I think they see the importance of that connection, because if we had been more connected and more coordinated as a world we could have handled this pandemic better. And I think our students instinctively, and maybe sometimes explicitly, *get that* and that's why they're eager to go. So I take enormous heart from that, and I think that bodes extremely well for what we want to do at University of Oregon, and what I believe GlobalPDX is all about.

Avery

Well there are so many other questions that I would love to put to you today Dennis, but we are out of time! Thank you for being a global changemaker, and thank you for being my guest today! I hope we can have you back soon, it would be great to revisit these topics again before too long.

GlobalPDX is a member-driven organization that's committed to keeping Oregon and Southwest Washington connected and engaged. If you aren't already a GlobalPDX member, learn about us at GlobalPDX.org. Thanks for listening.

Dennis

Thank you Avery, and thanks to all the listeners!