

**ABSTRACT**  
**PARALLEL WORKING SESSION**

**OUTREACH & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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**Going Global: Opportunities and Challenges for  
Open and Distance Learning**

The advances in e-learning and distance learning technologies during the last decade, including refined teaching designs, methods and support services, suggest that these innovations would have revolutionized the global higher education marketplace. Moreover, with globalization driving the interconnected facets of international economic, social, political, cultural and political life, early predictions suggested that e-learning or distance learning would have created a brave new world for cross-border higher education. It hasn't happened. Why?

Institutional leaders often rationalise that distance learning will accelerate their welcome on the international stage. In some respects, this would be an excellent strategy if the rest of world would just see the value-added simplicity in this approach. The rest of the world, however, is not quite ready to play in this virtual-sandbox.

China, North and South Korea, Japan, the Gulf States, Eastern Europe, Russia, Malaysia, India, and other nations have publicly stated they want access to Western technology, academic programs, research and technology transfer to help create sustainable economies, develop a multi-talented workforce, and ultimately build stable higher education systems at home. The challenge for distance education is these nations want real people rather than virtuality, particularly when they are allocating significant fiscal resources for these services.

Indeed, the credibility and perceived quality of importing Western resources appears to be directly related to having real people (academics, researchers, business executives, etc.) on the ground in-country. The net result is that the majority of cross-border higher education is being delivered at branch campuses, corporate sites, and through unique public-private partnerships. Many universities are, however, serving international students via distance learning and overseas branch campuses utilize a variety of technologies to facilitate teaching and learning, manage university administrative structures, and provide students with a range of support services. Moreover, many of the countries that import Western academic programmes, research and technology transfer have extensive distance learning programmes operating inside their borders for native students. In sum, global distance learning has not kept pace with advances in innovative educational technologies and paradoxically many countries offer internal distance programmes at the same time they employ restrictive policies for foreign providers delivering programmes via technology.

This session will discuss some of the opportunities and challenges facing institutional leaders for developing global distance learning programmes. A summary of best practices and leadership strategies will be offered for 1) building sustainable partnerships, 2) bridging language, cultural, and social issues; 3) balancing e-learning delivery with face-to-face modes; and 4) developing quality assurance mechanisms for foreign delivery.