

Reflections on an International Faculty Exchange: A Case Study of Two Universities in the US and Hungary

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Abstract

Faculty exchange programs provide opportunities for joint research, teaching, and serving wider communities. These exchange programs can take numerous forms, including short-term, long-term, and even virtual exchanges. This case study explores the international mobility experience of two faculty members, one from the U.S. and one from Hungary. Our findings highlight several strategies that can benefit faculty members interested in embarking on such a unique journey: initiating the exchange project early in the planning phase, maintaining consistent and regular communication, demonstrating flexibility in goals and timelines, and securing organizational support from their home institutions. This study demonstrates that faculty exchanges significantly contribute to institutional internationalization efforts and enhance students' learning experiences. At the same time, these exchanges provide invaluable opportunities for faculty members to grow professionally, academically, and personally.

1. Introduction

International partnerships in higher education have been a cornerstone of many colleges and universities around the world. Over the past several decades, numerous educational institutions have established academic collaborations for the benefit of both students and faculty because international partnerships enable institutions to share resources, such as libraries, laboratories, and expertise, fostering collaborative projects in research and teaching [1].

By pooling their limited resources, participating universities can leverage their partners' experiences and expertise while contributing their own human and material assets. In this way, global partnerships serve as a powerful mechanism for creating mutually beneficial outcomes among participating institutions, with shared goals in research, teaching, and learning. Additionally, successful partnerships can significantly enhance the global reputation and visibility of the institutions involved.

More specifically, one form of international partnership—faculty exchange—plays a pivotal role in promoting global collaboration. Faculty exchange programs offer opportunities for joint research, teaching, and community service. These exchange

programs can take various forms, including short-term, long-term, and even virtual exchanges [2]. For instance, a short-term exchange might involve a faculty member teaching a course abroad, while a long-term program could entail a year-long research collaboration or teaching opportunities for diverse student populations. Various formats of exchange programs not only help build international academic and professional networks but also foster connections with relevant industry or public/private agencies. These new relationships can undoubtedly broaden the scope of research and teaching initiatives. In this context, the aim of this paper is to present one case of faculty exchange that could serve as one model for enhancing personal, professional, and academic growth through international experiences and mobility.

2. Literature Review

Prior research has highlighted the benefits of faculty exchange, including expanded opportunities for teaching, research, and service [3]. Through both formal and informal interactions, exchange programs can foster closer and more in-depth understandings of the universities involved [4]. Furthermore, the expansion of professional and academic networks from the exchange experiences increases participants' satisfaction, particularly regarding their professional development. It also potentially expands teaching and research topics and opportunities [5], [6].

Despite its significant role in higher education, some countries have not prioritized "faculty internationalization," often due to a lack of policies, resources, or institutional interest [7]. Even when faculty members participate in exchange programs and spend time abroad, some studies have identified challenges in integrating into host institutions or barriers to applying their experiences upon returning to their home institutions [8]. These challenges often stem from cultural differences, resource constraints, and organizational limitations [9]. Notably, early-career faculty members may encounter difficulties in applying the knowledge and skills they acquire abroad within their home institutions [10].

Nevertheless, a key consensus among prior studies is that international collaboration through faculty

exchanges can significantly enhance institutional success by improving and diversifying students' learning experiences, as well as fostering the professional and scholarly development of participating faculty [10].

3. Current Study

This study examines the international mobility experience of two faculty members, one from the U.S. and one from Hungary, through faculty exchange for one academic year. It provides a practical example of how to initiate, negotiate, and implement faculty exchange among international educators and researchers. Thus, it aims to offer valuable insights to other institutions and individuals seeking to develop and implement similar programs.

Importantly, we believe this case study addresses the gap in understanding the detailed processes and impacts of targeted faculty exchange, highlighting the benefits and potential. In summary, this study offers a comprehensive examination of the practicalities and outcomes of faculty exchanges, providing an actionable model for future initiatives.

4. Settings

Institutions

This collaboration involves two public universities from two countries: Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver) in the United States and Ludovika University of Public Service (LUPS) in Hungary. MSU Denver is a comprehensive university located in Denver, Colorado, with an enrollment of 16,345 undergraduate and 1,160 graduate students as of 2024.

LUPS, a national university based in Budapest, Hungary, specializes in educating future leaders of state agencies, including law enforcement and ministries. In 2024, its student population includes 3,722 undergraduates, 1,879 graduate students, and 292 doctoral students.

The partnership between these two universities was formalized in September 2023 through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), designed to promote academic exchange among faculty, researchers, and students.

Faculty Exchange Participants

The lead author (Namgung) of this paper has a background as a police officer in South Korea, where he served as an Inspector for 16 years before transitioning to academia. He has been a faculty member in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at MSU Denver for 11 years, teaching courses on policing, research methods, criminological theories, and other criminal justice topics. He also

organizes short-term study abroad programs, having led groups of 10 to 15 students to South Korea and the United Kingdom on four occasions.

The coauthor (Christián) is a full professor at LUPS, a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at MSU Denver (2024/2025), and a uniformed member of the Hungarian National Police, holding the rank of Police Brigadier General. He began his professional career in 2002 as a lawyer with the Customs and Finance Guard and later held various management positions at the National Tax and Customs Office. Since 2013, he has served as the Head of the Department of Private Security and Municipal Policing. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *Magyar Rendészet* (Hungarian Law Enforcement) and Vice President of the Law Enforcement Committee at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Since 2020, he has served as Vice Rector of LUPS, overseeing education of the university.

As noted, both authors share a background in law enforcement as practitioners. We are deeply committed to teaching students, conducting research in the field of law enforcement, and fostering international partnerships. While the core responsibilities at our respective institutions differ slightly (i.e., teaching versus administration), we believe that such international collaborations provide invaluable opportunities for students and faculty to engage in global learning experiences.

5. Faculty Exchange Process

We began discussing the possibility of a faculty exchange in the summer of 2023. Initial communication was facilitated by a mutual acquaintance who knew of our plans to teach and conduct research in other countries. After expressing interest in spending time abroad, we began exchanging emails to collaboratively share plans and develop ideas.

5.1. Potential Exchange

Discussions about potential goals and plans for the exchange began in the summer of 2023, with the exchange itself targeted for the summer of 2024. The lead author intended to spend his sabbatical leave in a new academic environment, while the coauthor was interested in conducting research with the potential support of a Fulbright research grant. Once we agreed on the mutual benefits of collaborating, we worked independently on our respective applications for sabbatical leave and the Fulbright fellowship.

During this time, we also collaborated on a book chapter, recognizing that the chosen topic would further enrich our academic expertise. This initial collaboration, conducted entirely virtually, resulted in the publication of an academic paper [11]. Additionally, we jointly developed an Institutional Review Board proposal to facilitate the coauthor's

Fulbright research, ensuring that MSU Denver could support his data collection and research activities during his stay in the United States.

5.2. Formalization of Faculty Exchange

While working on their individual applications, we also engaged with our respective institutions to secure financial support through teaching and research activities at our host universities.

Fortunately, both institutions responded positively to our requests. The lead author signed a contract with LUPS for a paid teaching and research position from September 2024 to June 2025. Similarly, the coauthor received approval for research support and teaching arrangements at MSU Denver. This institutional support was crucial in securing approval for our sabbatical leave and Fulbright fellowship applications, both of which were finalized in early 2024. Notably, the coauthor's receipt of the Fulbright grant provided a strong foundation for the faculty exchange program and reinforced the momentum toward achieving the mission of international mobility.

5.3. Implementation

The exchange process commenced in July 2024 when both authors relocated to our respective host countries. First, the coauthor arrived in Denver, Colorado, in mid-July, where the lead author introduced him to the MSU Denver campus, highlighting key resources and facilitating meetings with important university personnel. Then, the lead author arrived in Budapest, Hungary, later that month, where LUPS faculty and staff—coordinated by the coauthor—provided extensive support to help him settle in.

Beginning in the fall 2024 semester, we actively engaged in teaching and research activities at our host institutions. The lead author was invited to deliver guest lectures in several classes and presented his research at campus conferences at LUPS. Similarly, the coauthor delivered lectures to MSU Denver students, initiated research activities, met with campus leaders and administrators to discuss potential university-wide initiatives, and participated in several university events. These outcomes are further discussed in the next section.

6. Outcomes and Plans

Outcomes

Although this faculty exchange project is still ongoing, it has already yielded multiple outcomes through focused collaborations. First, we have undertaken several research projects, including

academic conference presentations and the publication of a scholarly book chapter. For instance, we presented collaborative work at the annual meeting of the European Society of Criminology in Bucharest, Romania, in September 2024. Additionally, we shared our unique faculty exchange experience was further shared with other international educators at the Ireland International Conference on Education in Dún Laoghaire, Ireland, in October 2024.

Second, we have actively engaged in teaching activities at our host institutions. Each of us was invited to serve as a guest lecturer in multiple classes, covering topics such as the Hungarian policing system and comparative criminal justice systems. Furthermore, we have planned to teach courses in our respective host institutions during the Spring 2025 semester about victimology (at LUPS) and community policing (at MSU Denver). Additionally, we collaborated to develop a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program in Budapest, Hungary, for MSU Denver students, which will be offered in Spring 2025.

Finally, we have organized an international workshop for young Hungarian scholars and practitioners at LUPS, scheduled to take place at MSU Denver in April 2025. This workshop aims to expand academic and professional networks and further strengthen the partnership between the two universities. Participants, including students, faculty, and community professionals at MSU Denver, will have the opportunity to exchange insights with their Hungarian counterparts, particularly on policing and other critical law enforcement topics.

In summary, this faculty exchange has facilitated significant teaching, research, and service activities at both universities. It has enriched students and campus communities by exposing them to diverse international perspectives and experiences. Additionally, several new areas and topics have been identified as having the potential to further expand cooperation between the two institutions.

Plans

Once the exchange project is completed, we plan to evaluate the overall process and outcomes and share our findings with other interested stakeholders. This assessment will include a discussion of potential areas for improvement in similar partnership projects.

The evaluation will also explore how these experiences can contribute to sustainable and expandable international collaborations for future students and faculty. Personal and professional networks established during the exchange will serve as the basis for identifying new opportunities. Therefore, we plan to assess the reintegration process for returning exchange faculty and evaluate ways to share knowledge and experiences with other colleagues and departments on campus.

7. Lesson Learned

The journey from conceptualizing the faculty exchange to its implementation has been filled with excitement, challenges, and fulfillment. While we believe that any motivated faculty member can embark on similar collaborations, several key lessons should be considered by those exploring similar initiatives.

First, initiating the exchange project early in the planning phase is critical. Understandably, international exchanges are time- and energy-intensive processes. Faculty must not only manage teaching, research, and professional development in a new environment but also address logistical concerns such as housing and relocation.

Second, consistent and regular communication with clearly defined project outcomes is essential for success. We maintained frequent communication with administrators at both universities to discuss available support and resources. Weekly online meetings, complemented by emails, text messages, and video calls, helped us build strong personal and professional relationships. These communications also facilitated the exchange of ideas, clarification of questions, and the development of both short- and long-term plans.

Third, flexibility in goals and timelines proved beneficial. Setting clear expectations and priorities—particularly regarding student-focused tasks and collaborative research—ensured that we remained aligned. Since it is not uncommon for two or more people to have differing plans and goals within the same program, open-mindedness can play a pivotal role in the success of faculty exchanges.

Finally, securing organizational support is crucial. Thorough exploration of departmental, college, and university resources is essential for facilitating international relocation and task management [12]. Institutional interest and backing, such as administrative approvals and financial support, significantly contributed to the success of our project in addition to the integration to the new environment [13].

8. Implication for Future Exchange

Faculty exchange programs offer substantial benefits for professional, academic, and personal development, while also creating opportunities for broader institutional growth [14], [15]. Although implementation of faculty exchange may be easier in “entrepreneurial” and “systematic” institutions [16], we believe most small-scale projects need not be overly complex if faculty members effectively utilize available resources and networks. Additionally, exchanges do not have to be mutual as in our example; faculty members can participate in exchanges with global partner institutions independently of simultaneous exchanges.

First, faculty exchanges can have a far-reaching impact beyond the participants themselves, benefiting students, faculty, and even the broader community [17]. Strengthened or newly established university partnerships can enhance students’ learning experiences, contribute to campus internationalization, and improve institutional visibility in the global education market [18]. Examples of tangible outcomes include collaborative teaching and research projects, study abroad programs, workshops, and presentations that involve wider campus participation.

Second, effective faculty exchange requires optimal use of available resources [19]. While personal and professional networks are valuable, institutional agreements, such as Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), often provide underutilized opportunities for visiting faculty. Campus international offices, in particular, can assist in identifying partnerships, securing financial support, and providing logistical assistance. In other words, faculty members can develop detailed plans and achieve greater project success by leveraging existing resources and connections.

9. Conclusions

This study explores the experiences of the authors in a faculty exchange program between two institutions over the course of one academic year. By detailing the processes of our experiences, we provide guidance and suggestions for faculty members interested in pursuing similar international endeavors.

Faculty exchanges support institutional internationalization and enhance students’ learning experiences. Simultaneously, these exchanges provide unique opportunities for faculty members to grow professionally, academically, and personally. Although this paper focuses on one specific collaboration, we firmly believe the processes and outcomes described may be applicable to other institutions in different contexts. The implications and recommendations outlined in this study can assist faculty members and administrators in planning and implementing global partnerships. We hope that our experiences serve as valuable resources or models for those seeking to embark on this rewarding academic journey.

10. References

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