

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY'S STRATEGY TO ENGAGE WITH THE REGION THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SINGAPORE CAMPUS: RE-IMAGING THE TROPICS

Professor Stephen Naylor, James Cook University (Singapore)
Mr Suhaimy Hassan, James Cook University (Singapore)

Introduction

The following paper provides a single longitudinal case study of an organisation that has employed strategy, policy and even procurement of space, within the tropical zone, in order to achieve its goals, of teaching & learning and research which are grounded in a sense of place. Much of the data has been gleaned from a literature review, interviews with key stakeholders and additional selected documents held by the University. All other information in this paper is supported by observational data. Whilst this paper does not seek to break new ground within the transnational education industry, it does attempt to provide a case study offering comparative data for other approaches and initiatives in higher education. While the paper makes reference to nine years of operation in Singapore, it is by no means a complete story. The final phase in embedding the strategic initiatives are currently being realised through a Tri-Campus Integration Strategy, where staff from all campuses contribute to an alignment of policies and procedures aimed at making one University in two Countries on three Campuses located in Townsville, Cairns and Singapore.

A brief history of transnational campus development

James Cook University (JCU) was established in 1970 as the Australian University for the tropics. Since that time it has moved closer to achieving its initial aim by an extension of its presence from North Queensland deeper into the Tropical zone. Historically the higher education sector has attempted to develop talent from other countries by offering educational opportunities through a range of scholarships and fellowships. The most noted of these include the Rhodes Scholar program, the Fulbright and in the Australian context the Colombo Plan, a bilateral Commonwealth initiative forged in 1950 to provide social, technological and educational opportunities for South and south-east Asian countries (Lowe 2002). These models were built upon a virtuous premise that sought to share knowledge across global borders and assist countries to developed greater capacity for the future (Gallagher and Garrett 2012). The initial models of moving students from developing countries into universities throughout the world, provided a foundation to build a transnational education program in key locations closer to the source of accessible students. The establishment of education hubs in Singapore, Malaysia and the Middle East has been seen as one of the success stories of the past two decades (Gallagher and Garrett 2012).

By 2007, it was estimated that more than 5 million students were engaged in transnational education programs. These programs were based around a consumption model of full fee paying students largely catering for the growing middle class in the region. Many institutions had capitalised on cheap air travel, encouraging 'fly in - fly out' teaching models and the utilisation of online education or other blended modes of delivery (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007). Australian Universities such as RMIT, Curtin, Monash, ANU, Wollongong, Sydney and Adelaide all shared in the transnational education boom in Singapore. Australian institutions have established a range of transnational academic collaborations with public and private Singaporean institutions. These institutions received invitations from development organisations/non-profit organisations and established partnerships with local polytechnics/universities, private higher education institutions or global education management organisations such as *Navitas Ltd*¹. Despite the range of franchises and partnership models that have functioned in Singapore over the past decade, JCU is the only Australian University to run an autonomous 'full service' (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011, p117) operation without partners on its two independent campuses in Singapore.

There is little consensus in determining a comprehensive definition for an international branch campus (Lawton and Katsomitros 2011), however, the various guises of these entities intersect in the discussion of transnational education (TNE), and the more recent concept of multinational universities (MNU) (Gallagher and Garrett 2012). There is also evidence that suggests that MNUs go through phases of development from a rapid growth consumption model, to capacity building and then a phase of national enrichment, where graduates become the leaders in their own National sector limiting the necessity for the foreign Universities to provide the credentialed academic programs (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011). National governments will also make formal overtures for high ranking universities to provide discrete programs within the national context. An example of this is French business school INSEAD with its charter of being 'The Business School for the World'. On occasions national governments will provide subsidies to stimulate local students to attend MNUs in order to develop a self-sustaining higher education system within their country²; governments can also create legislative frameworks to protect the national and foreign students. These strict standards based regulatory entities will place additional burdens on MNUs and can interrupt the flow of international students into these countries.

JCU Singapore is fully certified as a Private Educational Institution (PEI) that provides a range of full time/part-time, face-to-face delivered programs including English language preparation, foundation, undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and higher degrees by research. The courses are fully accredited by James Cook University's Academic Board, and delivered through a coordination model by JCU Singapore using full-time staff and some sessional/contract local Singaporean academics. In our current model there is virtually no fly in fly out teaching, JCU Singapore academics not only coordinate and deliver subjects they contribute to the research quota of JCU Australia and have roles in many University committees including boards of studies, examination committees, education committees and the peak planning and governance committees of the University.

Where there has been criticism that branch/offshore campuses have been treated as second-class citizens (Smith 2009), James Cook University has moved to an equity model

¹ Who currently partner with Curtin University of Technology

² without the necessity of providing infrastructure

through an investment of time and energy to develop a culture of one university located in two countries with three major campuses. In contrast to some other MNUs, our Vice Chancellor regularly visits and conduct business from the Singapore campus and the chair of the Academic Board has undertaken a three-month residency based in Singapore yet servicing the entire University in both countries. There has also been a strong alignment by the Australian Associate Deans of Teaching and Learning, making numerous visits to JCU Singapore to conduct workshops, a Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching), and introduce a range of initiatives that had been developed in Australia through various teaching and learning networks.

JCU has also adopted a different model by not 'cherry picking' (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011, p108) only profitable courses such as IT and business, but also offers a full psychology program which is APAC³ accredited; with post graduate clinical programs providing almost 40% of psychology professionals for the Singapore health industry.

The drive to establish branch campuses

Where some universities have moved into Southeast Asia with grand ambitions and sudden departures (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011), James Cook University cautiously moved into Singapore with an intention to stay for the long haul.

Asia has been viewed by many Australians through a range of lenses, from friend to foe during turbulent times; a cheap labour source in 19th century, a site of low-cost manufacturing in the mid-20th century, and more recently an industrial/technological giant capable of consuming vast amounts of natural resources from our Australian mines, forests, agriculture and marine environments. Asia has been seen as an exotic destination, with the rich culture which has been explored and exposed through academic study of language, art and Asian histories. For many Australians South-East Asia is seen as a group of developing nations, in need of support and our university structure⁴, a source of international students for our financially strapped higher education system or an opportunity to establish franchised institutions in densely populated Asian cities (DEEWR 2008; Lien 2008). Gradually we are becoming aware of the potential to rethink our relationship with our near neighbours in Southeast Asia and to 're-image the tropics' as more than a 'Torrid Zone'.

In order to make genuine contribution in transnational education it has been crucial to move beyond a paternalistic or colonial approach to merely gain advantage from the region. We have learnt to give as well as take (Cheun 2006). For JCU, part of its success is the strong strategic direction which has been guided by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Sandra Harding, which pursues a vision in creating a brighter future for life in the tropics worldwide, through graduates and discoveries that make a difference.

JCU has recognised that Australia and Singapore have developed deep ties in education since the days of the Colombo Plan. There are roughly 100,000 Australian alumni in Singapore⁵ including several serving as Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliaments and corporate captains. As a country that places a high stock on education, a nation driven by

³ Australian Psychology Accreditation Council

⁴ English based programs

⁵ Source: Australian Alumni Singapore website - www.aas.org.sg/messages/ viewed 5 September 2012

innovation, Singapore represents an ideal location for JCU to grow its tropical agenda beyond northern Australia.

Background of JCU in Singapore

James Cook Institute of Higher Learning (JCUS) was established in 2003 through an initiative by the Singapore Government's Productivity and Standards Board (PSB) in a quest to develop Singapore as an international educational hub. With an initial enrolment of 50 students, offering a range of courses including: engineering, psychology, business and information technology programs, JCUS began to make its place in Southeast Asia. Its first campus was at the Spring Building, a commercial high-rise building not far from downtown Singapore. This approach followed a standard transnational model of franchising higher education in commercial building with a clear profit motive.

The minority 49% shareholding held by JCU was soon reversed to give greater stakeholder capacity to effectively manage the University's integrity within the company. Despite holding majority share JCUS was certainly viewed by many JCU Australian staff as an imposition, requiring high levels of coordination and management by the various schools and departments, for little return and marginal educational outcomes. The model of relatively few full time academics and high numbers of unaligned sessional staff, provided a largely 'teaching only' enterprise that attempted to do the best it could in a clearly commercial framework.

Over the years, JCUS grew from a small institution to its current profile, with student numbers in excess of 2,500. It now provides a fully integrated trimester program; the campus delivers more than 50% of the EFTSL for the School of Business, Information Technology and Psychology and now contributes to the research output of the University, sharing in curriculum/policy development and academic administration. JCUS has been recognised by the Singapore Government in a number of community awards and is often held up as a significant player in the training of clinical psychologists for the Singaporean health system. It offers close to 50 academic programs (including majors) and has an international student body from more than 50 countries, including Singapore, China, India, Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Germany, France, Australia and Uzbekistan.

As JCUS gradually developed from a fledgling transnational educational project, the main partner PSB (Productivity and Standards Board)⁶ was bought out by the German internationally recognised testing body TÜV SÜD⁷. Whilst JCU held a majority stake in the company there was a misalignment in terms of the strategic intent of both shareholders. In 2011, JCU gained full ownership of JCUS after buying out the remaining 49 % share of its minority shareholder TÜV SÜD PSB Academy. This paved the way for JCU to become a truly tropical university operating in 2 countries in 3 tropical cities.

⁶ TÜV SÜD acquired PSB Corporation Pte. Ltd. and PSB Certification Pte. Ltd. (PSB) in March 2006. The formerly state-owned PSB Group began its operations over 40 years ago under the name SISIR and is a market leader in management systems certification to international standards in South-East Asia.

⁷ German acronym and stands for "T_echischer Ü_{ber}wachungs-V_{er}ein Süd" what means basically "technical inspection association"

JCUS currently has a multinational staff population of 150; it has increased its full-time academic staff strength over the years. This has reduced the necessity for freelance sessional staff and is now in a strong position to manage the quality of the education experience and to create a culture of research active staff, just like their counterparts in Australia.

The gradual development over the past decade saw operations move from the Spring Building to be more conducive higher education campus at Upper Thomson Road and more recently into its second premises at Ang Mo Kio. The Upper Thomson campus of JCU Singapore is located within a private residential enclave at 600 Upper Thomson Road. The property used to be a government high school before it was refurbished in 2008 at a cost of more than S\$10 million to house JCUS's first fully-fledged campus.

The Ang Mo Kio campus is located in the densely populated public residential suburb at 10 Ang Mo Kio Street 54. JCUS was offered the Ang Mo Kio site as its second campus with help from the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB). It started operating from this campus in June 2011. Originally built to house a public school, plans are afoot to refurbish the Ang Mo Kio campus.

Why Singapore?

The term 'internationalisation' has been included in the statement of strategic intent of Australian institutions to showcase the Education Provider's intention to engage in transnational education and research (DEEWR 2008). The selection of Singapore as one of JCU's major campus location outside Australia represents the University's desire to deliver a brand of education and engage in research relationships that benefit the tropical world.

Like Australia, Singapore is a multicultural society with a highly developed economy. Students from North Asia and South Asia find Singapore a convenient and desirable setting to pursue a quality Australian qualification due to a familiar Asian environment. Singapore's robust economy, which demands talented qualified professionals, is also one of the factors driving the influx of students from other parts of Asia to JCUS.

At the time when JCU opened its campus in Singapore, the country had identified education as one of the key economic growth areas under the Global Schoolhouse initiative. In building this Global Schoolhouse concept, three important components were identified: i) attract good foreign institutions, ii) develop Singapore's own local institutions and enterprises and iii) bring in large numbers of international students. JCUS has been at the forefront in helping Singapore achieve its objectives of growing its education sector.

JCUS's presence in Singapore has helped to meet the growing demand for university education by an affluent middle class population capable of paying unsubsidised tuition fees (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007). The Singapore government has recently made a pledge to increase the university cohort participation rate to 40 per cent by 2020 from the present 27 per cent⁸. This will equate to increasing the number of university places from the current 13,000 to 16,000. There is still scope for quality tertiary providers to educate Singaporeans who yearn to earn a university degree as recent statistics will suggest. The bulk of students

⁸ The university cohort participation rate does not include Singaporeans in part-time degree courses, those who study at overseas universities and students enrolled in local private institutions.

admitted into the local universities come from the 17 local Junior Colleges (JC) which offer the two year Cambridge GCE 'A' Level curriculum. Between 2008 and 2010⁹ the final year enrolment of the JCs were reported to be above 15,000 students each year. During the same period of time, the local Polytechnic sector has been graduating over 21,000¹⁰ students annually. The five local polytechnics have been the main source of student intake for Australian universities from Singapore for both onshore and offshore studies. Over the past decade more than 600 PEIs¹¹ have attempted to establish themselves in Singapore, with some dramatic and damaging withdrawals from industry. Just as in the period following the GFC in Australia, many PEI's found it impossible to maintain quality and regulatory requirements associated with transnational education, this saw the introduction of the Singapore Council for Private Education (CPE) in 2009, established to provide quality assurance system to protect the interests of transnational students. The number of PEI's has been almost halved during this period and JCUS has been endorsed as a quality provider in Singapore's private education landscape. In 2010, JCUS was one of the first private education institutions in Singapore to be awarded the EduTrust 4 year certification. Our contributions to the Singapore education industry were also recognised in 2012 by Dr Amy Khor, Minister of State for Health announced in Parliament that the Ministry of Health has "increased the local pipeline for clinical psychologists, through NUS's (National University of Singapore) and James Cook University Singapore's postgraduate programmes".

Following the acquisition of the minority shareholding in JCUS, the entire JCU structure has moved to fully integrate its three major campuses - Cairns, Singapore and Townsville. The concept is to avoid 'doing international' in various places as international becomes an integral dimension of JCU through these three campuses. Instead of a dual-city university, JCU becomes a tri-city university, bringing Singapore, both the city and campus, into the powerful an enduring aim of the University to deliver a brighter future for life in the tropics worldwide. A Steering Committee and an Operations Committee with a number of working groups have been formed to guide the processes of integration. One of the most important factors in forging a strong connection between the JCU campuses in Singapore and Australia is to ensure that the academic standards and rigours remain high (Smith 2009). All full-time academics recruited to work by JCU Singapore hold concurrent appointments at JCU Australia, they are expected to be research active and contribute to curriculum design.

Growth of JCU Singapore

The growth in commencing student numbers at JCUS over the last 4 years has been significant as illustrated in Table 1 below. To add to the positive growth in student figures, JCUS has managed to attract students from the less traditional Asian countries as illustrated by the rising cohort of students from Europe and USA. Such diverse student mix has truly turned JCUS into a cosmopolitan and vibrant institution¹².

⁹ Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 2011

¹⁰ Yearbook of Statistics Singapore 2011

¹¹ *More Private Schools Expected to Close* The Straits Times, 25 July 2011 and Second Reading Speech on the Private Education Bill, Parliament Sitting on 14 September 2009 by Mr S Iswaran, Senior Minister of State of Education

¹² The international student population are made up of mainly undergraduate and postgraduate students who hold the Singapore student pass (visa). A small percentage of full-time students are Singapore permanent residents. The part-time students are enrolled in postgraduate programs and

Table 1. Student Enrolment at JCU Singapore

Source of student	2008	2009	2010	2011
Singapore	258	360	310	335
India	167	186	205	261
China	179	301	418	481
Vietnam	84	127	147	127
Myanmar	12	23	45	51
Indonesia	43	47	87	158
Others (European & USA)	40	77	59	101
Malaysia	3	14	10	34
Thailand	\	6	16	18
Philippines	\	2	4	3
Korea	\	5	18	17
Laos & Cambodia	\	1	5	10
Total	786	1149	1324	1596

Source: JCU Singapore Student Management System

As of April 2012, the total student number at JCUS was 2350 this has since been increased with the June study period enrolments. Table 2 below reflects the size of the total student body in relation to the programs they are enrolled in. Business courses (both undergraduate and postgraduate) remain popular with psychology following closely behind. Psychology can be described as JCUS's anchor program and almost all the students enrolled in this course are local Singaporeans.

Table 2. Student Enrolment by Program

Enrolments by Program	Student Numbers
Pre-University	369
UG : Business	646
UG: Business and Env Science	25
UG : Psychology	547

are made up of Singapore nationals, Singapore permanent residents or foreigners who hold a Singapore employment pass (visa).

UG: IT	99
PG : Business	451
PG: Psychology	15
PG: IT	71
PG: M.ed ,MGC	44
Doctor Of Psychology	10
Study Abroad	37
Graduate Certificate Of Research methods, GCCD, GCEd	36
PhD	3
Total	2353

Source: JCU Singapore Student Management System

Singapore is well positioned to be a key player to account for the expected growth of transnational education in Asia. A UK Vision 2020 paper reported that Asia will account for 639,000 places or 79 % of total global demand for United Kingdom's transnational higher education by 2020 (Böhm, Follari et al. 2004). Australia may still continue to draw students from Asia, "but with the costs of education rising, Australia is becoming more and more vulnerable to changing market demand" (Verbik and Lasanowski 2007, p.9). Indeed, JCUS is keen to capitalise on such projections as it continues to provide quality education in Singapore.

Academic Management

As in any public University in Australia, all academic matters are managed by the Academic Board through a series of Faculty Boards of Studies, Education Committees and Subcommittees¹³. Within the JCU policy framework for Learning, Teaching and Assessment there is a Charter Academic Responsibilities which determines delegation and jurisdictional issues related to all curriculum, pedagogy and accreditation issues. JCU has continued to build structures that facilitate a quality system to operate in each of its three campuses in two countries. External bodies such as the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the recently initiated Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and a range of other Australian professional accreditation bodies, regularly undertake audits of all three JCU campuses. In association with the Australian auditing regime JCUS has participated in Singaporean quality assurance including Singapore Quality Class (SQC) and EduTrust Singapore¹⁴. Part of the commitment to quality enhancement is to gain recognition

¹³ The titles of these committees may change in various Australian institutions including titles such as Academic Senate.

¹⁴ EduTrust is a voluntary quality certification scheme implemented by the Ministry of Education as part of the Private Education Act to allow local private education institutions to differentiate themselves as having achieved higher standards in key areas of management and provision of educational services.

of JCUS's, university status in the Singapore, a goal not yet attained by any of the PEIs. If JCUS can attain EduTrust 'Star' rating (the pinnacle of the EduTrust accreditation scheme) then it may be recognised as a Singapore Branch Campus (SBC) of a foreign institution and acquire the right to include the word 'University' within its nomenclature in the Singapore jurisdiction. This symbolic status will bring us closer to being a 'de facto comprehensive University' based in Singapore and create greater opportunities to enable local Singaporeans students to gain degrees and postgraduate qualifications, from a University Campus rather than a mere a PEI.

The Strategic Intent

Whilst many universities have moved into transnational education to broaden their student market, JCU has moved away from the simple model of franchising its Australian product for an international market, into a strategically designed move to broaden the Universities Charter to genuinely 'make a difference' within this tropical region. This simple but effective goal has drawn the University into a range of initiatives, including a curriculum refresh, review of policies, specialisation geared towards Tropical focused recruitment and promotion regimes and an emphasis on tropical research.

The recently revised Strategic Intent gives greater emphasis to areas including the comprehensive but focused themes of: Tropical Ecosystems and Environment, Industries and Economies in the Tropics, People and Societies in the Tropics and Tropical Health, Medicine and Bio Security. There is also a strong recognition that a 'sense of place' is essential for linking into both the community and other fields of endeavour where our graduates may take up employment positions. The University also embraces the diversity of the communities we serve, in both Singapore and North Queensland and acknowledge the rich cultures of the Indigenous peoples and the spirit of Reconciliation that guides our future. James Cook University is renowned for its work within tropical ecosystems and its commitment to developing sustainable environments for future generations by ensuring that our actions today do not limit the range of social, cultural, environmental and economic options for the people within our region. These aspirations guide our learning and teaching and research in all of our campuses and sit at the core of our operations.

Special Initiatives Guided by the Strategic Intent

In order to optimise recruitment, a combination of strategies are used throughout the region, these include country teams to liaise with both selected agents and discrete JCUS foreign staff to market our product. JCUS has designed its own placement tests for English language skills and offers pro-active workshops and seminars for agents and councillors in numerous Asian countries sending a strong message of our clear strategic intent and not merely a volume based enterprise. There has also been strategic participation in responding to the needs of students through our own Pathway College.

In recognition of the non-English-speaking background of many of our students JCUS runs an English Language Preparation Program (ELPP) designed to both develop English language skills with a strong emphasis on academic writing and critical analysis competencies. This program has branched away from the traditional IELTS approach and is designed specifically to meet the needs of students from our region and to assist them in a smooth transition into the undergraduate and postgraduate programs. In recognition of the

schooling systems from the region and our commitment to uphold academic quality, we have developed a foundation program for students who do not hold year 12 equivalency. This program also pathways students, from throughout the region, directly into undergraduate programs; there has been an extraordinarily level of success by these students as they excel in their first year of the degree programs¹⁵.

Student Experience

As perhaps the only fully fledged and non-franchised Australian institution in Singapore, JCUS is keen to offer an Australian education experience to its students in Singapore. Apart from the regular pastoral care and student support services, JCUS has developed student friendly services and facilities to ensure students spend quality time on campus.

To create a similar education experience to that of students studying at JCU Australia, significant resources have been invested in the refurbish of the Upper Thomson Road campus and similar sources are being allocated for the Ang Mo Kio campus. There has been a continuous upgrade of student facilities, including the establishment of a student lounge with dynamic eLearning spaces, an expanded library and a focus on creating tropical settings for student social engagement in a series of outdoor trellis settings with sporting and social infrastructure.

JCUS maintains a strong commitment to student pastoral care with student counsellors and student service staff having direct responsibilities to particular country cohorts of students, in order to make the transition from their home country to the JCUS experience. There is also a commitment to providing career related counselling and supporting a number of clubs on campus including chapters of Toastmasters and the Golden Key Society.

In our quest to provide equitable student experience, public lectures by various tropical leaders are presented sequentially during the year; this allows both students and the community to gain a greater rapport with their professional and civic responsibilities when they graduate.

The Future

As JCUS works towards gaining EduTrust Star status we are also pursuing a number of initiatives with the Singapore Government and other Singaporean Education Institutions. In our quest to 'make a difference' JCU is in negotiations to develop a Tropical Futures Institute as a research centre, investigating both terrestrial and marine sciences with potential commercial outcomes for the Singaporean economy. The recent announcement by the Singaporean Minister for Education (MOE), urging PEI's to move away from international volume-based student recruitment towards a more quality driven product designed to meet the needs of the Singaporean students exiting the Polytechnic system, is clearly within the JCU strategic intent.

The University has planned for continued gradual growth towards 5000 students, comprised of quality candidates from both Singapore and international cohorts. These students should

¹⁵ Between 2010 and 2011 (6 trimesters) more than 95 per cent of students that have moved up from the Foundation Program to the first year undergraduate program have successfully progressed without having to sit for any supplementary examination based on formal results from the Student Management System.

be housed in an Australian style campus in Singapore, with both quality learning & teaching and relevant tropically focused research being undertaken by staff for the benefit of students, community's and nations this tropical region¹⁶.

Conclusion

The development of the JCUS operation brings a new twist to the notion of internationalisation and provides an opportunity for JCU to demonstrate a genuine expression of international engagement and global reach. Instead of practising internationalisation in various places, international becomes an integral dimension of JCU through its three campuses. The Singapore, Cairns and Townsville campuses underscores JCU's compelling commitment to deliver a brighter future for life in the tropics worldwide.

From a corporate standpoint, JCUS is emerging as a fully integrated part of the entire JCU family. All JCU faculties and divisions will have tri-campus reach. This represents the potential for JCU to create the first authentically cross border international Australian university, evidenced by the fact that this development simply extends the 40-year-old mission of JCU to be present in and focus on the issues of the peoples of the tropics.

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