

Winds of Peace Foundation Concept Paper
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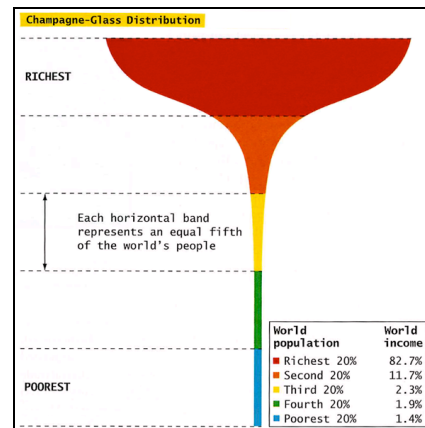
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THE CHALLENGE:

Nearly every college and university mission statement today talks about forming leaders and effective world citizens, yet global economic and environmental indicators present the magnitude of the challenge that the next generation of professionals must face. The former Jesuit Superior, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, expressed it this way in an address at Santa Clara University in October 2000, “Universities must make it possible for students ... to allow the disturbing reality of this world to enter into their lives, so that they learn to feel it, to think critically about it, to respond to its suffering and to commit themselves to it in a constructive fashion. They will have to learn to perceive, think, judge, choose and act in favor of the rights of others, especially of the most disadvantaged.” ... The measure of Jesuit universities is not what our students do, but who they become and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in the future towards their neighbor and their world.”¹

The Winds of Peace Foundation (WPF) is seeking to partner with a US institution of higher learning to create a synergy center in Managua, Nicaragua that would take advantage of the Foundation’s 30 year history in transformative educational experiences, social and economic development efforts, and the extensive network of relationships and contacts with local groups and institutions working on these very issues. The purpose of the center is twofold: 1) energize students and faculty to contribute to efforts to change the current global reality through direct experiences and encounters with local populations; 2) harvest the accumulated learning and network of contacts on the local level to facilitate relevant, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary research in the service of that change. This approach seeks to both make available to local populations the expertise of the university in their search for solutions to problems of human development, as well



“Champagne Glass Graphic”, Cover of 1992 UNDP Human Development Report. Fr. Xabier Gorostiaga, President of the Central American University in Managua from 1991-1999, used this figure to challenge fellow educators: are we training professionals to fit into a system that reproduces this inequality, or are we preparing leaders to “overturn the champagne glass.” The 2007 updated version of the graph shows that global income inequality has gotten worse.

¹ The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice, by Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., Santa Clara University, October 2000.

as allow the realities of these populations to inform the academic experience of both students and faculty.

BACKGROUND:

Harold and Louise Nielsen, already innovators in the business they founded in Kenyon, Minnesota, called FOLDCRAFT, underwent a profound personal transformation in 1983 after participating in an international experiential education program in Mexico and Nicaragua. This led them to take two steps internationally: 1) they began to support experiential education experiences for US citizens to different countries in the developing world, to raise their awareness and understanding about the challenge of global citizenship; 2) they founded the Winds of Peace Foundation to support local grassroots initiatives for economic and social development in the developing world. They financed these two initiatives by selling their successful factory to its workers under an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP)².

Over the course of time the WPF decided to narrow its focus in order to increase its depth in a specific local reality, and so opened a permanent presence in Nicaragua in 1994, where it now works almost exclusively. Currently WPF disburses about \$1.2 million a year in the form of loans and donations to support three major constituencies: indigenous peoples, rural women, and cooperatives in the central northern region of Nicaragua.³ Since 1997 WPF has made nearly \$10 million dollars in uncollateralized loans to organizations doing rural lending, and has a loan loss rate of under 2%.

Currently it has opened two additional major initiatives: the first is a major study of coffee cooperatives in collaboration with one of the best rural research teams in the country. Based on those findings, the team is now involved in working with coffee cooperatives to help them overcome the organizational obstacles to their success as social economic enterprises, and to unleash the potential of the effective and informed participation of their membership in their operations.⁴ Secondly, after the death of Louise in January 2011, the Louise Nielsen Fund was begun to focus on improving educational levels of the population in Nicaragua. An initial round of funding has focused on teacher training initiatives, largely through institutes connected to the Central American University, a Jesuit University in Managua, as well as scholarships for low income students in schools providing high quality education through the Fe y Alegría school system.

² FOLDCRAFT now as an ESOP has been a recognized leader in that association, among other recognitions winning the Outstanding Employee-Owned Company in America award in 1998.

³ The majority of the lending is being done through the Local Development Fund, initially an initiative of the Central American University. Although legally independent, it is located on the UCA campus. WPF also collaborates closely with the UCA's research institute, Nitlapan, in its work of territorial development.

⁴ These values are foundational for WPF because of its connection to the experience of FOLDCRAFT, both through its founders, Harold and Louise Nielsen, and also its current Director, Steve Sheppard, who prior to coming to WPF was CEO of Foldcraft for 16 years.

POTENTIAL OF THE PARTNERSHIP:

Nearly 30 years of both promoting international experiential education with US groups⁵, as well as grassroots development initiatives in Nicaragua, has provided the Foundation with a wealth of information and social networks. These resources could be harvested by a university seeking to increase the global competence of their faculty, as well as make that wealth of installed capacity available to its students seeking to understand better the world they live in and their responsibility as global citizens. ⁶ New technologies facilitating hybrid and online courses and Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) pose possible challenges to the way education currently happens on campus, but on the other hand, a university with these connections could take advantage of those same technologies to bring directly into the classroom a wide variety of people and input whose voices are not usually heard in higher education. The practical experience of people working in every discipline in Nicaragua, including the challenges they are confronting from their location in the global reality, can enrich faculty research and teaching, and also students' active engagement with these same issues. ⁷ This type of international grassroots access can make a university's offering distinctive for prospective students looking for a more global experience in their classroom and academic careers. At the same time it can extend the scope of the impact of the university far beyond the campus, and create a self-reinforcing virtuous cycle – the more it confronts the challenges of local development through its alliance with WPF, the more it informs its own learning and teaching, the better it equips its students to change the global reality.

For its part the Foundation's long-term presence at the grassroots level in Nicaragua, and its history - coming out of and supporting employee ownership - is generating knowledge that can make a valuable contribution to the construction of new ways of being and relating in the world today. Through this partnership it seeks a channel to disseminate that learning, as well as the learning coming from partnerships within Nicaragua, including the Research and Development Institute of the Central American University. Through this channel, the Foundation envisions an impact on the larger world of higher education, so that the leaders of the future might have a different awareness about how just relations can be built on a practical level, and thus avoid some of the common pitfalls of current development efforts. The synergy coming out of such a relationship – knowledge and experience of the foundation and its networks plus academic study of and use of that experience –

⁵ Most of this done through the Center for Global Education and Experience at Augsburg College.

⁶ Nicaragua provides a unique laboratory for this type of awareness given the long history of US involvement, the Sandinista revolution, low intensity conflict known as the contra war in the 80s, the post Sandinista and current Sandinista period, all of which can also provide a window into the impact of current US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

⁷ Though many may think immediately of the humanities, or helping professions like those related to medicine, WPF contacts have been used to facilitate a delegation of math majors using their skills in support of a rural community.

could bring about more positive change than either institution can achieve on its own, both in the developing world, as well as the world of higher education.

SPECIFIC PROPOSAL:

WPF would provide significant funds toward the building of a structure that would provide food, lodging and conference space, and would use its expertise to facilitate the synergy between the university's work and the historical and new work of the Foundation, specifically: 1) experiential educational programming, aimed at the US educational community and public in general, under the auspices of the university, but taking advantage of the contacts and expertise of the Foundation and its historical partner, the Center for Global Education and Experience at Augsburg College; 2) promote faculty and student involvement and research in local communities and engagement with their problems; 3) develop new educational products that would bring the reality of Nicaragua into the classroom in the US, taking advantage of new technologies, enhancing international input into hybrid, online and other courses.

It is the experience and expectation of the Foundation that such a facility would be financially self-sustaining and generating a surplus in the short term, which could be used to finance other initiatives by the university. The income would be generated through the experiential educational services offered, as well as running the facility as a guest house for those interested in the common mission when there is no scheduled visiting group. Furthermore, it could be used as a basis for recruiting Nicaraguan students to attend the partner university.

Augsburg College, the initial partner of WPF in its work in Nicaragua through its Center for Global Education and Experience, is supportive of this initiative and is interested in continuing its current programming through the new partner. The income from the costs of running their highly regarded semester program and travel seminars could provide the economic and programmatic basis to allow for a seamless transition to the new institution, including the Center's widely respected, experienced staff. This would allow the new institution to develop its own high quality educational offerings and services by building on the existing 30 years of experience.

A significant investment in the building would be made by the Foundation, and income generated from the use of the building or any educational products would remain with the university partner. Ownership of the facility would belong to the university, with provision for continued focus on the work described herein. The Foundation would maintain its own autonomy, as would the university. The shared space would provide the ongoing opportunity for mutual future collaboration and learning.

A recent analysis of the financial situation of universities, especially in light of the new developments with online courses, cautions against more investment in

physical capital⁸, but does recommend “ a willingness to invest only in innovations that truly create value for the institution.” We think our experience with both experiential education and grassroots development work would provide that value for an institution whose mission and focus coincides with our own.

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⁸ See “Bain Brief: the Financially Sustainable University” at http://www.bain.com/Images/BAIN_BRIEF_The_financially_sustainable_university.pdf, accessed Sept 7, 2012.