

Global Support Project, University of Washington

“Arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity,” noted Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the UN. Educational institutions are increasingly embracing the opportunities offered by globalization. A university without an effective administrative infrastructure, however, will be hindered in getting its global vision off the ground. The obstacles to operating internationally are significant and include unfamiliarity with foreign business laws, a limited willingness to tolerate international risk and locally-based policies and procedures that don’t necessarily work in a global context.

By 2006, the University of Washington (UW) was experiencing all of these problems during a time of explosive growth in funding for its international activities. For example, in 2002 the UW received \$19.2 million for a five-year award for HIV AIDS training and education operations in several developing countries. In the successive five-year renewal, the award was \$130 million. This funding success, however, was accompanied by researchers’ doubts that the university could scale its services fast enough to keep stride with quickly expanding international programs. At the same time, UW President Mark Emmert identified leadership in solving global health problems as a significant institutional goal. Thus, important strategic and operational objectives were at risk if the administrative support couldn’t be improved. Global activities, by their nature, are interdisciplinary. Similarly, an interdisciplinary approach was needed to strengthen the administrative infrastructure.

Description of the Global Support Project The response from the Senior Vice President for Finance and Facilities (F&F) was to launch the Global Support Project (GSP) initiative in May 2006. This effort is led by the Associate Vice President/Controller and is administered on a daily basis by a dedicated project manager. The work is accomplished through multiple methods including cross-disciplinary process improvement teams, a web-based portal and facilitation to broker acceptable solutions. The diagram below displays the project structure.



Innovation The GSP is unique among large, U.S. research institutions for its embrace of both process improvement and project management methodologies to improve central administration support. The GSP is a synthesis of two change models that have each operated successfully in separate spheres at the UW for many years. The Quality Improvement Program in the Financial Management Division (FM) has been a long-standing, effective method to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of key services like payroll, purchasing and invoice payment. The second model, the USER Project, combined project management with customer input to create technical solutions for significant, system-wide needs, like replacing paper-based procedures for payroll. Key elements of this approach include professional project management, influential sponsors and a senior-level steering committee.

The focus on customer support, as opposed to compliance, has been another innovative feature. We have found that by leading with service, that compliance, effective risk mitigation and trust are significant derivatives. Each administrative unit has an identified international contact who is available for consultation and problem-solving. In addition, cross-unit teams are chartered to create, streamline or refine administrative processes that aren't working in the international arena.

The project has a strong connection with the academic administration of the university, another innovation. The Vice Provost of Global Affairs in the Provost's Office is a close working partner with the project and co-chairs the bi-monthly Core Steering Team meetings. The Vice Provost is one of the key decision makers in managing international safety and in decisions to establish operational offices abroad.

The project created and maintains a unique web portal (<http://f2.washington.edu/fm/globalsupport>) that features information, tools and links to campus resources. The checklists and flowcharts to manage some of the more complicated international processes, like paying an honorarium to a foreign speaker, have proven very popular with campus staff.

Impact The GSP, in collaboration with multiple teams, has made significant improvements in a number of areas. A 2010 F&F customer satisfaction survey confirmed the project's impact—85% of faculty and staff respondents reported overall satisfaction with the project. Highlighted below are four major efforts that have had campus-wide impact.

Legal registration In 2006, the UW had no effective mechanism for registering its on-going foreign operations. In 2007, the UW created a non-profit corporation wholly overseen by the university that can facilitate overseas registration. Currently, the UW is registered in nine countries with two more pending.

Funds management One of the first significant improvements accomplished by the GSP was to lobby for a change in the Washington state law that limited deposits in foreign bank accounts. The statutory maximum was an unworkable barrier for UW programs. In 2006, led by members of the GSP who worked directly with the State Treasurer's Office, changes were made

to the law that exempted the UW from the statutory dollar limitations. This change was the first of several improvements toward creating an efficient revolving fund process for foreign operations.

Expanded purchasing authority Large-scale operations at some of the UW's foreign sites were significantly impeded by both State guidelines regarding competition and internal UW policies. To respond, the Director of the Purchasing Department with facilitation by the GSP, created a multi-phased approach to delegate purchasing authority to in-country staff. Delegation "readiness" is gauged by full installation of financial software, a successful external financial audit and a satisfactory review by UW Purchasing staff. If deemed "ready," purchasing authority can be delegated up to \$75,000 per expenditure.

Global emergency management The UW is 7th nationally in number of undergraduates who study abroad and has research activity on all five continents. What the university didn't have was a comprehensive plan to assist faculty, staff and students should they run into safety or security problems abroad. The GSP led an 18-month planning effort to create a university-wide plan that would more effectively coordinate assistance. A key feature of the plan is a dedicated travel security manager within the Provost's Office to manage international incidents. The UW is now one of only ten institutions in the country that has this level of support for its international travelers. Another significant accomplishment in this effort was successfully lobbying the State legislature to overturn laws that prevented the university from purchasing or requiring students to buy international health insurance. Beginning in 2010, UW international travelers will enjoy significantly strengthened support for incidents ranging from natural disasters to accidents to illness.

Resources Two new positions were created by reallocating funds within FM to support this initiative; a project manager who leads the daily activities; and, an international purchasing specialist who specializes in global procurement. The outlay of additional funds has been limited to creating the website and securing outside legal counsel for advice on the formation of the non-profit corporation. Most of the work, however, is done by existing staff as part of their regular responsibilities.

Collaboration, customer service and a willingness to innovate have proven a successful combination at the UW to support globalization. The Chronicle of Higher Education profiled the GSP as one approach to keep international projects running smoothly (<http://chronicle.com/article/One-Universitys-Strategy-f/19688/>). Interest in the project from more than a dozen U.S. and international universities also suggests a desire for new solutions to this important issue. The UW experience has been that campus business units can play a critical and strategic role in helping to achieve an institution's global agenda.