

## Chapter 7

# Managing Visiting Scholars' Program during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

Q1

International mobility outgoing and incoming from almost every university around the world is not just oriented to highly educative standards among them, but to enhance the development of international competences for students, as well as for academics. While students' mobility are mostly an individual effort that implies individual consequences, academics' mobility involve several resources from universities and trigger collective processes such as research collaboration, visiting lecturers, exchange experiences and best practices meetings, plenary sessions, classes, among others. This case study aims to provide insights about how planned activities related for/with visiting international scholars suffer major disruption and collateral damages when an unplanned and unexpected global crisis occurs, which forces them to react immediately under different real-time decisions and non-existent protocols. The chapter focuses on Latin America, using the case of the Global Business Week organized by Universidad de Monterrey (UEM) in Mexico, and involving visiting scholars from Peru and Colombia.

*Keywords:* Internationalization of higher education; COVID-19; pandemic; academic mobility; international mobility; health crisis; visiting scholars

### Introduction

It's moving fast, against the wind. (Boromir in The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring)

Previous to the COVID-19 pandemic, some academics around the world had the privilege to be like birds with huge wings that allowed them to move to different events and institutions in the planet, in relatively short periods, in order to do perform multiple academic roles (networking, collaborative research, invited teaching, etc.). Allocated international responsibilities when invited to a foreign institution such as plenary sessions, teaching classes, collaborative research project meetings, workshops, among others, keep together an international collaborative network of academics who move around the world, at a business as usual mode, integrating students as well as other academics as audiences of these activities.

According to Hawawini (2016) the internationalization of higher education institutions consists in incorporating an international dimension into teaching and research, as well as administrative processes, connecting the institution with the world in an integral sense and enhancing its main activities. Moreover, newest trends state that internationalization strategies in higher education need to evolve from a geographically dependent approach, to a theme-based structured (EFMD, 2018) in order to work together in transversal projects, no matter which countries are involved. This perspective encourages projects with larger numbers of countries as participants, making the internationalization dimension higher. Furthermore, several international accreditations standards for business schools consider as an important milestone the internationalization degree achieved by their faculty, students, and projects (AACSB, 2018; AMBA, 2016), understanding the value of cross-cultural perspectives as well as how to work efficiently under a global scenario. Hence, adding an international dimension into higher education systems pursues the alignment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015) boosting the educational quality (SDG 4) and allowing business schools to take part in international collaborative networks (SDG 17), which provide them with valuable resources.

Q2

On the other hand, due to the global pandemic declared on March 11, 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO) because of the COVID-19 virus, the exponential rate of contagion (WHO, 2020a) would drive faculty mobility activities into difficult dilemmas and force visiting scholars, host institutions and home universities to make immediate decisions without unprecedented protocol, due to the uncertainty regarding the new virus, government decisions and travel restrictions, and unreliable information. Academics around the world were forced to cancel or postpone their visits to foreign universities; professional conference and international team research gatherings were cancelled too, but many other faculty visiting were in the middle of the ongoing COVID-19 spread. The latter faces questions such as, how faculty and higher education managerial decisions were made toward internationalization activities facing the threat of another important goal, such as good health and well-being (SDG 3), during the COVID-19 global spread? The present case study aims to describe how the situation was of two management visiting academics from Peru and Colombia within an ongoing visit to Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico (UEM), for the Global Business Week program which was held between March 9 and March 13, and how

UDEM's faculty reacted facing a day-by-day rapidly changing scenario, according to COVID-19's aggressive and exponential global spread.

Therefore, this work is based on a qualitative case study based on both primary (ethnographic account) and secondary data (institutional communications, government announcements, and public media). According to Yin (2014), a case study delves into the behavior of people and events since the case has a purpose to explain why and how events happen. Conducting a case study research implies a process of five steps that include design, prepare, collect, analyze, and share information about the phenomenon of study.

### **Global Business Week Program at UDEM**

One of the strategies to face the aggressive competition among universities in the new global market is the internationalization of higher education. Under these circumstances, an internationalization strategy is a way in which higher education institutions (HEIs) are responding to the opportunities and challenges of globalization (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Bayramov & Abdrazakova, 2016). It is important to mention that the internationalization of education at Mexican universities has become a crucial element for the achievement of their objectives and as a strategy to cope with the challenges of globalization (Nava-Aguirre, Garcia-Portillo, & Lopez-Morales, 2019).

According to De Wit, Hunter, Egron-Polak, and Howard (2015), internationalization is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of education, in order to improve the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.

In general, strategies of internationalization in higher education in Mexico are divided into three categories: international relations, partnerships, and consortiums; student and faculty mobility (in-and-out); and internationalization at home (IaH), with different modalities according to each university.

Founded in 1969, Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) is a private, Catholic-inspired university located in San Pedro Garza Garcia, in the northeast of Mexico. Regarding internationalization, it is the Mexican university with the highest component of student internationalization (Dirección de Programas Internacionales DIPI, 2017). Also, UDEM is one of the most recognized private schools in Mexico, accredited nationally and internationally.

UDEM's academic organizational structure consists of a Vice Presidency of Health Sciences; Vice Presidency of Architecture, Arts, and Design; School of Business; School of Education and Humanities; School of Engineering and Technologies; and School of Law and Social Sciences. At present, UDEM offers 46 undergraduate degree programs, 4 baccalaureate programs, 16 master's degree programs, 13 graduate specialties, 37 medical specialties, and one doctorate. Since its foundation, UDEM has become a leading teaching and research university; it currently has 15,867 students and 1,163 faculty members (UDEM Business School, 2019).

On the other hand, UDEM's Business School is the largest school at UDEM, with 2,569 students, 151 faculty members, 10 undergraduate programs, and 5 master's degrees. Its mission is based on four pillars: academic excellence; globalization; transformational leadership; and the generation, diffusion, and application of knowledge (UDEM Business School, 2019). This school has the most participation in student mobility abroad and at home in UDEM. This is important to mention that the Global Business Program is the only undergraduate degree program accredited by AACSB in all Mexico.

One of UDEM initiatives of internationalization at home (IaH) is the concept of *international campus*. This initiative and others such as international curriculum, and international culture are permanently promoted in UDEM (Direccion de Programas Internacionales, 2017). For example, in the first semester of 2020, UDEM Business School invited two visiting scholars outside Mexico to support internationalization of UDEM. There were two specific actions. First, the participation of a Colombian scholar (P1) through the official UDEM's Visiting Scholar Program and second, the invitation of a Peruvian scholar (P2) to participate in the "Global Business Week" (GBW), an international event organized by the Association of Global Business Students and the support of the Director of the Global Business Program. For this international event, students, alumni, faculty, businesspeople, practitioners, and academics from other institutions in Mexico and other countries are invited to participate annually.

For the first semester of 2020, nominated international scholars were selected according to their credentials, experience, and availability. By an official invitation letter by UDEM, chosen scholars were asked to participate and they agreed. Even though international scholars were invited for different purposes, the physical presence of both international scholars meant to contribute to UDEM internationalization aims. After scholars' acceptance, different on-site activities and agendas were planned for visiting UDEM Business School in Monterrey city as follows (Tables 7.1 and 7.2).

Q3

These planned agendas were confirmed by both scholars one week prior to their arrival. However, as is noted in the next sections, the recently discovered virus in China, which rapidly and exponentially expanded to Europe, North America, and the rest of the world, reasons why the agenda needed to be immediately intervened.

### **The Global Pandemic: COVID-19**

According to Nunes-Vaz, Arbon, and Steenkamp (2019), once a sudden and sustained event occurred, such as an epidemic, healthcare systems are stressed to the point of overwhelming their functionality, and demand for real-time decisions, considering the interconnectedness between all parallel systems in the countries' economy. Even after the disaster, healthcare systems' performance could be challenged by the number of cases not directly related with the disaster, but as a secondary effect of it in the population (Wong & Li, 2016). Moreover, availability of reliable information is crucial in countries that are more likely to suffer from

Table 7.1. Visiting Scholar Program Activities (Colombian Visiting Scholar).

<b>Event</b>	<b>Type of Activity</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Audience</b>
“Doing Research and Publishing on Latin America”	Conference	1.5	Faculty: Teaching and research academics
Meeting	Planning future projects with researchers	1.5	Researchers
“Yellow Research Lunch” (Research exchange seminar)	Conference	1.5	Teaching and research academics
Radio Show	Interview	1.5	Broad community
Global Business week	Class	1.5	Students
Global Business week	Class	1.5	Students
Global Business week	Class	1.5	Students
“From NAFTA to TMEC”	Special guest	1.5	Academics, students, and faculty
Global Business Week	Key note	3.0	Alumni, academics, and faculty
Global Business Week	Class	1.5	Students

Source: Authors.

Table 7.2. Global Business Week Event (Peruvian Visiting Scholar).

<b>Event</b>	<b>Type of Activity</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Audience</b>
MBA Class	Class	3.0	MBA Students
Meeting	Planning future projects with researchers	1.5	Researchers
Global Business week	Class	1.5	Students
Global Business week	Class	1.5	Students
Global Business Week	Class	1.5	Students
“From NAFTA to TMEC”	Special guest	1.5	Professors, students, and faculty
Radio Show	Interview	1.5	All community

Source: Authors.

natural disasters because it would lead to better decisions during the event (Goldblatt, Jones, & Mannix, 2020). According to Eyre (1999), governments and organizations need to be aware of relevant information during a disaster to facilitate the coordination of actions and decisions. Hence, disaster management has effects during the crisis as well as after it, that requires taking real-time decisions under unusual stress amounts and limited information.

The COVID-19 virus has exponentially grown and by 28 March 2020 (time when this case study was finished), there were more than 623,000 cases around the world, with more than 137,000 of them having recovered and unfortunately an approximate of 29,000 dead (Worldometer, 2020). Who could think that in less than three months, since four cases of pneumonia were found in a small market in China by December 26, COVID-19 would put under a serious health threat big Eastern countries such as China, Italy, Iran, Spain, South Korea, among others? The WHO was forced in just about two months to pass from a “public health emergency of international concern” status on January 30 (WHO, 2020b) to a “pandemic” status on March 11 (WHO, 2020a). As a highly contagious disease, the WHO stated six strategic goals on its March 16 report of COVID-19: (1) interrupt human-to-human transmission, (2) faster identify, isolate, and care of patients, (3) reduce the transmission from animals, (4) address clinical issues and accelerate the development for a cure, (5) communicate and counter misinformation, and (6) minimize social and economic impacts (WHO, 2020c).

On the other hand, by the time of the Global Business Week compared with European or Asian countries, Latin American and African presented a lower number of contagion cases, but with an exponential growth rate. Fig. 7.1 shows the number of cases in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru from March 9 to March 16, 2020, the week the global pandemic was announced, evidencing that even when Colombia had fewer cases than its counterparts, growing rates among these three countries are quite similar.

According to Glasser (2016), escalating disasters affect more low and middle-income economies, due to limited resources that have to be oriented to disaster management, rather than focusing their investment in poverty reduction or education enhancement. Hence, Latin American countries conducted several different mandates in order to stop COVID-19's fast spread, such as social isolation, borders lockdown, emergency status, deployment of military forces, among others. Thereafter, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) provided evidence that people in Latin America, since March 14, 2020 and ahead, exhibited major changes on their online preferences, by preferring in-house entertainment rather than outside ones, demonstrating that social distance initiatives could be working well in these countries (IDB, 2020).

Organizations, as well as countries, have to focus on their surrounding community that allow their operational continuity, establishing predisaster management plans in order to remain responsible to them and keep them safe (Miyaguchi & Shaw, 2007). Universities depend to some extent on their local community of workers, teachers, and students, and they have to ensure their safety is within their social responsibility commitment. These contingency plans could permit

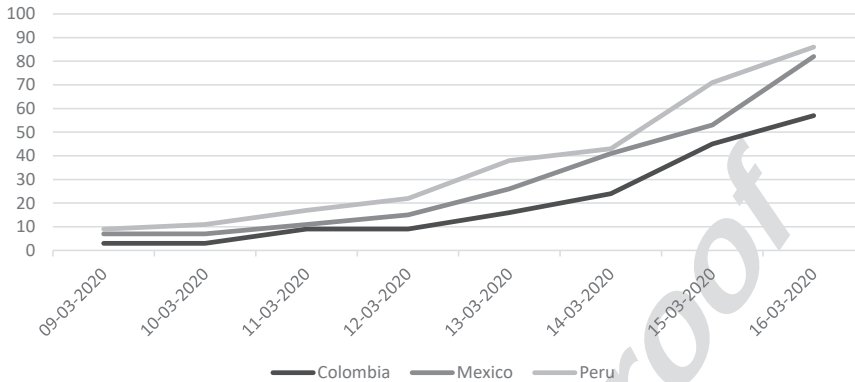


Fig. 7.1. COVID-19 Confirmed Cases in Mexico, Colombia, and Peru from March 9 to March 16, 2020. *Source:* Data compiled from Official Website of Health Ministry of Peru (<https://www.gob.pe/institucion/minsa/>), Official Website of Health Secretariat of Mexico (<https://www.gob.mx/salud>), and Official Website of Health National Institute of Colombia (<http://www.ins.gov.co/>).

organizations to step forward into institutionalized disaster mitigation policies (Grove, 2013). Complementary to this, Dr. Gonzalez-Perez argued that an important dimension of the same social responsibility appears when organizations need to stop their operations and daily activities in order to ensure the safety of their community within a postdisaster scenario (Forbes, 2020).

### COVID-19 Has Moderated International Mobility of Academics

The spread of the coronavirus, named as COVID-19, caused different reactions in countries and universities around the world. For example, the first official announcement from private universities to stop international trips in and out of Mexico, Colombia, and Peru was Mexico. This official announcement from UDEM informed visiting scholars about the situation in UDEM and suggested to verify any decision or restriction from Colombian and Peruvian universities and immigration authorities. The same day of the UDEM announcement, and two days before traveling from Colombia to Mexico, P1 based on institutional and national government guidelines decided to cancel the academic mission to Mexico. Under these circumstances, P1 offered to participate virtually in all planned activities and face this global pandemic in the best possible way. After discussions between directors and faculty of the host institution, finally UDEM decided to postpone the participation of P1 for the next semester for two reasons. First, the benefits from on-site activities and face-to-face interaction as the main aim of the institutional Visiting Scholar Program and second, there was no guarantee for technological and virtual infrastructure for the closing conference in UDEM. The option to move on-site to main virtual activities was very risky for the event.

On the other hand, the reaction from the scholar from the Peruvian private university was quite different. At that moment the scholar received a UDEM notification (one day before travel) regarding (outgoing) travel restrictions imposed by the Mexican university, and high likelihood of quarantine when arriving home. UDEM asked the academic to verify any instructions from the Peruvian government or the home university travel to Mexico. After the confirmation of the scholar, P2 travelled to Monterrey, Mexico, as the original planned schedule, and finally arrived in Peru (returning home) one day before the Peruvian government closed its borders.

After recommendations from universities and several governments, and in order to continue with the Global Business Week, UDEM modified the original agenda. It demanded additional administrative efforts, mainly the work from the Director of the Economics Department; the Director of the Global Business Program; the President of the Association of Global Business students, and one full-time faculty responsible for planning the original agenda. From the beginning, all these collaborators were involved in the agenda of the visiting scholars. Meetings or classes changed its topics; some meetings were virtual, and the final day of activities (the last day of the GBW) was eliminated from the agenda since UDEM announced to cancel all classes on Friday to start a general sanitization for all UDEM buildings on the weekend as a measure for prevention. Day by day, uncertainty was growing, and a week that started with a strong handshake, ended with a shy and distanced salutation.

As a summary, the main modifications were as follows:

- (1) Visiting Scholar Program for the first semester of 2020 was cancelled. The P1 visit was originally postponed to the UDEM Business School during the School Business Fellowship 2020 in October (same year). The agenda would include on-site activities such as: classes, conferences, workshops, radio shows, and networking.
- (2) Additional activities were requested to P2 in order to accomplish the agenda. P2 accepted to participate in extra activities modifying some topics and roles.
- (3) No virtual activities were included in the Global Business Week since on-site and face-to-face interactions were the attractiveness of the agenda.
- (4) Activities with students were maintained, but activities with teaching academics and researchers were cancelled.

Q4

In sum, the event offered 8 conferences, 6 of them international with a total participation of 550 students and 60 alumni. At the end, the Global Business Week in UDEM was successfully developed in spite of implications from COVID-19 and many changes.

## **Discussion and Lessons for the Future**

Unexpected global disasters, like the COVID-19 pandemic, drive organizations to real-time decisions (Nunes-Vaz et al., 2019) following nonexistent protocols. Nevertheless, lessons may be learned from several cases that occurred before,



after, as well as during the crisis. The present case study is focused on the latter, describing how organizations and scholars have to handle a visiting scholar activity with real-time decisions toward an ongoing global health emergency.

During the crisis, a well-performed level of awareness was needed in order to obtain valuable information, which is important to be available and consulted frequently through the unexpected event period. Hence, it has to be available from the institutional sources, and faculty need to be aware of it as many times as possible, allowing them to make informed decisions through reliable gathered information (Eyre, 1999; Goldblatt et al., 2020).

Q5 In addition to this, communication has to be fast, even at the risk of being informal. Making it faster could prevent health risks, and fulfill expectations of professors and audiences. It would be recommended that only one person be in charge of communicating to academics the information they may need and of sudden changes.

Q6 Moreover, acting under ethics statements for every part involved in the activities exhibited a proper commitment. In the case of the host university, committed with its principles of integrity, having an institutional release first than universities of Peru and Colombia, UDEM warned visiting professors at least two days before travelling. HEIs have to stick to core values, adding an ethical component to their decisions. In other words, academic integrity is a core element while taking important decisions at institutions. Stopping organizations' operations after the disaster could be an important decision of social responsibility toward the academic community (Forbes, 2020).

Furthermore, having additional Plans B, C, D, E, and F could be a good idea. Alternative plans for virtual meetings need to be supported by proper technological infrastructure, which need to be included even in the design phase of buildings. Even on-site activities should consider alternative options in case of extraordinary situations. Having alternatives or contingency plans tends not only to reinforce business continuity through institutionalized disaster mitigation policies (Grove, 2013), but social responsibility of the community jobs too (Miyaguchi & Shaw, 2007).

Finally, collaboration and flexibility among parties involved could make changes easy for everyone in the process. Trust and close relationships between visiting professors and UDEM were very useful at the time while making unexpected changes in the original schedule. Visiting professors exhibited a good disposition and a collaborative behavior that facilitated ongoing changes.

## **Final Remarks**

All lessons captured and highlighted in this case study are focused on finding a balance between health, human lives, national government measures, international coordination, economic impacts, and internationalization of higher education, or in other words, between SDGs 3, 4, 8, 16, and 17 considering that academic and administrative faculty involved in the situation need to make immediate decisions based on limited information, and act fast.

Organizations have to prompt a constructive sense of disaster risk management into their direct community, as well as of the potential effects that these unexpected events may cause across the multiple interdependencies in the society's processes. A community's broader sight of disasters would reinforce its commitment to follow and support contingency plans. Moreover, organizations have to take responsibility of proper information diffusion and its timing, in order to provide their communities with adequate mechanisms to decide under stressful situations. In addition to this, organizations would need to turn those contingency plans into disaster mitigation policies, providing them structure and continuity over time.

Universities could incorporate lessons highlighted in this case study to establish contingency plans for their predisaster and postdisaster operations, and/or reinforce their current disaster mitigation policies. Furthermore, academic mobility has to be taken as a trigger for collective initiatives that involve other academics and large groups of students, putting them at risk under a potential disaster situation. Therefore, academic mobility, as an intensive multiple-task and travel initiative, needs to be specifically included in universities' disaster management procedures.

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### Queries and/or remarks

[Q1]	Please check the edits made to the sentence “This case study...” and amend if necessary.
[Q2]	Please check the edits made to the sentence “On the other hand...” and amend if necessary.
[Q3]	Tables [7.1, 7.2] were not cited in the text. Please check that the citations suggested are in the appropriate place, and correct if necessary.
[Q4]	Please check the edits made to the sentence “At the end...” and amend if necessary.
[Q5]	Please check the edits made to the sentence “It would be...” and amend if necessary.
[Q6]	Please check the sentence “Moreover, act under...” for clarity.
[Q7]	Please check the edits made to the Reference [Hawawini, 2016].