
Tucson: a global knowledge network hub

By Mike Proctor and Lee D. Lambert

Even before its recorded history, Tucson has been a gathering place for trade, culture and ideas.

Our strong and unique cultural influences, Sonoran desert geography — which spans an international border and the presence of scholars and business people from around the world, make the city a unique multicultural environment defined by collaboration, innovation and creativity.

Our cultural heritage and physical location mean we are poised to serve as an essential hub in the growing global knowledge network.

Due to continually advancing technology, the world is becoming smaller. Never before have we had access to information more quickly or easily. Economies are changing and becoming more interdependent, societies are more diverse, and there is a growing interconnectedness among people from around the world.

Businesses are increasingly collaborating with international partners, and that’s part of why it’s so important for students to obtain international exposure and experiences. By embedding international experiences in their education, students will be better equipped for success in the global workplace.

Last year, the University of Arizona sent nearly 1,200 students abroad to study across the globe, and it currently hosts more than 3,600 international students from 113 different countries. These students taking part in cultural exchanges not only grow personally, but form invaluable professional connections and cultural awareness. They begin to understand how to solve problems from multiple perspectives. They’re also in a better position to land jobs post-graduation, as many employers value applicants who have had international experiences.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities of a globalized society is crucial to their success and, therefore, the future of Arizona businesses.

At the University of Arizona, we’re working on several projects of international significance that will help address the world’s grand challenges.

With partners from several nations, we are helping build the Giant Magellan telescope, which will become the world’s largest telescope, and will begin operations in 2020 at Chile’s Las Campanas Observatory.

The UA’s Mexico City office has been facilitating collaboration between U.S. and Mexican businesses and researchers since 2007, and our cross-border efforts were recently highlighted at the opening of the Arizona State Trade and Investment Office last month. We’re also partnering
with Mexico on Project REINU, a national university-based network that may someday look similar to U.S. cooperative extension models.

Aside from connecting students to these programs, we are also creating opportunities for UA students to work or study abroad, and to collaborate with students and faculty from other countries.

Pima Community College also emphasizes the need for academic institutions to prepare students for the global economic reality. Chancellor Lee Lambert recently returned from China, where he explored opportunities for partnerships as part of a broader initiative including Mexico, India and South Korea.

PCC also offers a certificate in international business management, which prepares students to work in a diverse workforce, either domestically or abroad.

Last month, both institutions jointly supported International Education Week, which was an international initiative dedicated to promoting the benefits of global education. All week long, the community learned how the UA and PCC are promoting international education through lectures, film screenings and performances.

Such education and outreach supports the reality that businesses of all sizes are part of an international marketplace, and are faced with more competitors than ever. Though globalization presents many challenges, it also presents countless opportunities for growth.

Strategy and cultural understandings are crucial for today’s business leaders. In Tucson, we are uniquely shaped by the many cultures that are part of our heritage. We live in a collaborative environment, and have unique perspectives we can use to shape our position in the international marketplace.

Our higher education institutions, innovative business leaders and diverse citizens are all important to the region’s success beyond the Sonoran Desert.

These factors and more are what define Tucson’s global identity.

Keep exploring: Learn more about the UA Office of Global Initiatives by visiting global.arizona.edu or by calling 520-621-1900. Learn more about PCC's study abroad opportunities by calling 520-206-6732 or emailing intadmit@pima.edu.

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