Report and Recommendations of the Task Force for International Partnerships and Agreements

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Executive Summary

With input from the Council of Deans, Provost Garnett Stokes appointed the Task Force on International Partnerships and Agreements to:

- **Assess and report current status/trends for current MU international agreements,**
- **Propose guidelines, policies and procedures** for submitting, reviewing, signing and evaluating international agreements,
- **Propose work assignments and responsibilities** to manage and monitor international agreements, and
- **Develop an outreach plan** to communicate these policies and procedures.

The need for clear, consistent, and efficient policies and procedures for the approval and renewal of agreements is crucial given the impact international partnerships and agreements have on MU’s global reach, reputation, and resources.

After reviewing and assessing institutional data, policies and procedures, and national models, the Task Force on International Partnerships and Agreements proposed the following set of recommendations to improve MU’s processes for approval, management and monitoring of international partnerships and agreements:

I. **MU should pursue high quality international agreements that promote strategic priorities.** MU currently has more than 200 international agreements with institutions in more than forty countries around the world. The Task Force found that not all were active and producing intended results. The Task Force noted that agreements may incur costs and obligations, whether active or not, and that for some these do not align with the benefits.

II. **MU should clarify the process and roles for international linkage agreements.** The Task Force drafted and recommends adoption of a “Handbook for International Linkages: A Step-By-Step Guide for Planning International Linkage Agreements” collecting policies, procedures, criteria, forms, samples, and a process map. Appendix 1. The Handbook incorporates a number of significant improvements to current procedures, including:

- requiring early consultation with the International Center;
- providing clearly articulated evaluation criteria and a required planning form that will be the basis for review and approval and monitoring and evaluation for renewal;
- involving International Center staff in drafting all such agreements for greater efficiency and consistency;
- formalizing an IMOU Review Committee chaired by the Vice Provost for International Programs to review and evaluate proposals and renewals.
III. **MU should establish a formal IMOU Review Committee.** The Task Force recommends that MU formalize and charge the current ad hoc International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) Review Committee with an expanded role in the review, approval, monitoring, and renewal of agreements involving international parties. The Task Force drafted an IMOU Review Committee Charter addressing its composition, objectives, scope and authority. Appendix 2. The Task Force recommends the IMOU Review Committee include representation from key administrative units, and faculty members nominated by the MU Faculty Council Executive Committee, Deans, and Directors. The Task Force recommends that the IMOU Review Committee be chaired by and provide the Vice-Provost for International Programs with its recommendations on specific proposals and renewals.

IV. **MU should use an efficient software system to store, review and approve agreements.** To avoid redundancy and duplication of effort, the Task Force recommends that MU use the in-house software platform used by Mizzou Finance for international agreements. To provide appropriate information to a wider audience, the Task Force recommends that MU post a separate list of institutions with which MU has a current agreement accompanied by a brief description. Maintaining international agreements in the Division of Finance database will facilitate efficient creation and updating of such a list of partners.

V. **MU should provide resources necessary to manage international agreements.** The Task Force found that consulting, drafting, reviewing and monitoring of international agreements requires significant staff time for effective engagement and support of MU academic divisions and other key stakeholders. In order to maintain and improve the management, and hence the quality, of MU’s international agreements, the Task Force recommends that appropriate staff and financial resources be directed to supporting the Office of the Vice Provost for International Programs, International Center Director and the IMOU Review Committee. The Task Force recognizes that in the current fiscal environment this may initially mean redirecting some staff effort and, when appropriate and feasible, dedicating new staff resources to this important process.
**Introduction**

MU enters agreements with universities, government agencies and NGOs located in other countries to facilitate a range of international activities such as faculty collaboration, student exchange, study abroad, and co-curricular programs. MU currently maintains approximately 250 fully approved agreements with institutions in more than forty countries around the world. Such agreements may provide important tangible benefits, such as revenues for services rendered, access to research facilities, data or funding, and student and faculty exchanges. Agreements may also provide intangible benefits such as enhanced visibility, relationships, and reputation.

International agreements may also introduce costs, obligations, and liabilities. Since countries have different legal systems and different standards and expectations in higher education, international agreements have the potential to introduce unanticipated liabilities and obligations and should be considered carefully. Agreements may also introduce distributed costs, duplications of effort or other inefficiencies that can offset expected benefits. MU must estimate the potential benefits and costs of these agreements. MU should monitor and manage these flows to maximize return on investment in international initiatives.

International agreements can be used to extend MU’s global reach and reputation. By planning and managing which agreements and institutional associations to pursue, MU can affect positively its reputation in particular regions and at home in Missouri.

**Overview of Task Force Process**

In January, 2017, the Interim Vice Provost for International Programs presented the Council of Deans with information regarding MU’s current international agreements, their impact on campus, and the process for approving and evaluating such agreements. Deans and Directors of academic divisions nominated members for the Task Force. In February, the Provost appointed and charged the Task Force on International Partnerships and Agreements. The Task Force included representatives from Academic Divisions as well as Key Office stakeholders such as Business Services/General Counsel, Provost and Chancellors Offices, Finance, International Programs, Enrollment Management, Graduate Studies and Office of Civil Rights/Title IX. The criteria for membership included knowledge of and experience with international agreements, an appreciation for how these tools affect MU global reach and reputation, and an ability to represent the strategic interest of their unit.

The Task Force first met on March 14, 2017, to review its charge and develop a work plan. The Task Force also reviewed current MU international agreements and procedures, and identified the following principles to inform their work:

- Guidelines, policies and procedures for submitting, reviewing, signing and evaluating international agreements should be consistent, clear, efficient, and minimize redundancy. They should promote internationalism consistent with strategic priorities and prevent unanticipated liabilities.
• Work assignments and responsibilities to manage and monitor partnerships and agreements should be equitable and fair, helping to ensure that those deriving benefits from international agreements also bear a proportional share of the costs, and that duplication of effort and other inefficiencies be reduced as much as possible.
• Implementation and outreach should build general knowledge about: 1) how agreements are submitted, reviewed and approved; 2) where MU has established agreements; and 3) what impacts they bring to our campus. The process for establishing an international linkage should be accessible, uniform, widely understood, and easy to use.

The Task Force held in person meetings approximately once-per-month from March through October, 2017. In addition, the Task Force used a secure Sharepoint site to exchange information and ideas between meetings. The Task Force also established several subgroups to focus on specific tasks and report to the Task Force. The “Process Mapping” subgroup helped the Task Force understand the current process for initiating, reviewing, and approving proposed international agreements and produced a visual map of the process recommended by the Task Force. The “database” subgroup sifted through options and ideas for efficient and secure storage, review, and approval of proposed agreements, as well as how to provide appropriate information about existing agreements to the general public.

In addition to closely reviewing processes relating to international agreements at MU, the Task Force reviewed administrative structures and programs for processing international agreements at peer institutions, including UC Berkeley, Pennsylvania State, Georgia, Duke, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Texas A&M. Using all this information, the Task Force drafted a “Handbook for International MOUs: A Step-by-Step Guide for Planning International Linkage Agreements” and revised it through several versions. The Handbook both collects existing policy and procedure and incorporates recommended changes. It is described in the discussion of Recommendation #2 below and attached as Appendix #1. The Task Force also recommends formalizing an IMOU Review Committee and using the MU Division of Finance database to store and review international linkage agreements. All five of the Task Force recommendations are discussed in the next section.

The Task Force sought to keep the MU community apprised of its progress throughout its work. It maintained a public web site that provided the Task Force charge and objectives, membership, meeting agendas and minutes. https://ip.missouri.edu/agreements/task-force/ Task Force members were encouraged to serve as liaisons with their units and to update Deans and Directors of academic units. The Task Force communicated its status with the Chair of the Faculty Council during the summer and provided a draft executive summary before finalizing this report. The Interim Vice Provost for International Programs, who served as a member, periodically updated the Provost and also the MU Council on International Initiatives.
Discussion of Recommendations

I. MU should pursue high quality international agreements that promote strategic priorities. The consultation and approval process should ensure that proposals align with MU strategic priorities and that such proposals demonstrate the intent and real potential to achieve significant positive impact. Additional indicators of high quality include factors such as maintaining MU’s standards of excellence with regard to admissions and other standards. Of the more than 200 international agreements currently in place at MU, the Task Force found that a significant portion were not active or producing intended results. The Task Force noted that agreements may incur costs and obligations, whether active or not, and that for some agreements these do not align with the benefits. When implemented, the Task Force’s recommendations will focus time effort and resources on international agreements likely to be high quality, active, and productive, and ensure that the burdens and benefits of agreements are fairly borne.

II. MU should clarify the process and roles for international linkage agreements. The Task Force found that MU can realize greater consistency and efficiency by clarifying and, where needed, adopting new roles, responsibilities and authority for all parties involved in the process of initiating, articulating, reviewing, approving, finalizing monitoring and renewing international agreements.

a. Handbook. To advance toward this goal, the Task Force drafted and recommends adoption of a “Handbook for International Linkages: A Step-By-Step Guide for Planning International Linkage Agreements.” Appendix 1. Collecting policies, procedures, and criteria in a single Handbook will improve the process for international linkage agreements by providing a single authoritative source for information about the process. Moreover, the Handbook provides definitions, guidelines, forms and samples. The Handbook incorporates a number of significant improvements to current procedures, including:

i. Requiring early consultation with the International Center before drafting documents or moving forward. Among other things, this will ensure early consideration of feasibility and alignment with strategic priorities, as well as the notification and involvement of additional stakeholders, especially where there may be distributed costs.

ii. Providing clearly articulated evaluation criteria to address in a required planning form. Those criteria will be the basis for initial review and approval and will serve as performance measures for monitoring and evaluation for agreement renewal.

iii. Involving the International Center staff in the drafting of every international linkage agreement. The goal is greater efficiency and consistency due to the International Center’s experience and expertise with these types of agreements. This is a change from current practice where the task of drafting the partnership
agreement is the task of the initiator, regardless of their level of experience drafting contracts or forming international partnerships.

b. Process Map. The Task Force created a “Process Map” as a visual aid to those who wish to understand and use the process outlined in the Handbook. See Figure 1 below and the explanation that follows.

![Figure 1: Preparation of an International Agreement: MU Process Map.](image)

**Figure 1: Preparation of an International Agreement: MU Process Map.**

**Explanation of Process Map.**

1. **Identify Need or Opportunity.** The process begins when an MU faculty member, staff member, or administrator identifies a need or opportunity that an international linkage could address. In some cases, this may be prompted by an overture or proposal from an international institution. Before consulting the International Center to start a review and approval process, the initiator may discuss feasibility and support with others in the unit and potential international partners, perhaps using the questions and guidelines from the Handbook.

2. **Consult the International Center.** Before drafting documents or moving forward with the potential international partner, the initiator should consult with the International Center. This will ensure early consideration of feasibility and alignment with strategic priorities, as well as the notification and involvement of
necessary stakeholders, especially where there may be distributed costs. This is a change from current practice where at times the International Center is not consulted until after an agreement has been drafted and the initiator is seeking approval and signatures from the Chancellor or Provost, perhaps during a visit on campus of an official from the potential partner.

3. **Unit Approval of Planning Documents.** The initiator then completes the “International Agreement Planning Form” found at appendix 9.1 of the Handbook. This form requires information about the partners to the agreement, both at MU and at the Foreign Partner Institution, and information about the proposed collaboration such as goals and objectives, current and planned activities, required commitments of funding, space, time, or other resources, and potential products. Early in its process the Task Force agreed that requiring the planning form would likely improve the quality of proposals brought forward. The Dean or appropriate unit official then approves the International Agreement Planning Form.

4. **International Center Drafts Agreement.** Based on the approved planning form, International Center staff will draft an International Partnership Agreement in consultation with the initiator and the MU contracts office. In some cases, prospective partner institutions or organizations may offer a draft agreement. If so, the International Center staff will review to confirm that the document accurately and completely reflects the collaboration described in the planning form and complies with MU requirements. The International Center may suggest changes.

5. **IMOU Committee Review and Recommendation.** The IMOU Committee will review the proposal planning form and draft agreement in light of the evaluative criteria listed at section 3 of the Handbook. The Committee will recommend approval or disapproval to the Vice Provost for International Programs.

6. **Approval by Vice Provost for International Programs.** If the VP for International Programs approves the proposal, it is forwarded to the Provost or Chancellor, as appropriate, for final review and approval. If the Vice Provost disapproves the proposal, the initiator may choose to abandon or rework the proposal, or ask their dean to initiate an appeal of the decision.

7. **Estimated Timeframe for Review of Proposed Linkage Agreements.** The timing of Steps 1 - 3 will depend on the particular linkage, considering for example the novelty or complexity of the proposed linkage, the number of stakeholders involved, the initiator’s compilation of information for the planning form, and the unit’s internal approval process. Once the Dean or Director of the academic unit approves the planning form, the Task Force estimates that Steps 4 - 6 (IC drafting agreement, IMOU Committee review, and approval by VPIP) will typically be completed in 3 - 6 weeks.
III. **MU should officially establish an IMOU Review Committee.** Currently, the Director of the International Center chairs an informal ad hoc committee to assist in the initial review of proposed international linkages. Recognizing the benefits of this committee, the Task Force recommends that MU formalize and charge this International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) Review Committee with an expanded role in the review, approval, monitoring, and renewal of agreements involving international parties. Toward the accomplishment of this recommendation, the Task Force has drafted an IMOU Review Committee Charge addressing its composition, objectives, scope and authority. Appendix 2. The Task Force recommends the IMOU Review Committee include representation from key administrative units and faculty members nominated by the Chair of the MU Faculty Council. The Task Force recommends that the IMOU Review Committee provide the Vice-Provost for International Programs with its recommendations on specific proposals and renewals.

The Task Force found that the effort required by the IMOU Committee in this expanded role would be significant but manageable. Table 1 below is a projection, based on current international agreements, of the volume of new proposals, three-year reviews, and reviews for renewal or termination that the IMOU Committee would handle each month. Most international linkage agreements are for a five-year, renewable term. Agreements are currently reviewed as proposed and at end of term. The Task Force felt that an intermediate review at the three-year mark would be very beneficial in helping ensure that agreements perform as planned and would be worth the additional effort.

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Table 1: Three-year review of proposed IMOU process applied to current 222 IMOU contracts.
IV. **MU should use an efficient software system to store, review and approve agreements.**

Currently, the International Center maintains a database with all active and pending agreements, called “Global Links”. However, this database is not readily accessible to others at MU. The Division of Finance also maintains a database of international agreements – as it does of all MU contracts. This database provides access for specific individual contracts to the fiscal officers and university officials responsible for the contract, but it is not otherwise accessible. To avoid redundancy and duplication of effort, the Task Force recommends that MU use the in-house software platform used by Mizzou Finance to store international agreements. The functionality used for review and approval of other types of contracts will also support the process for international agreements.

To provide appropriate information to a wider audience, the Task Force recommends that MU post a list of institutions with which MU has a current agreement on the worldwide web, accompanied by a brief description of the agreement. Maintaining international agreements in the Division of Finance database will facilitate efficient creation and updating of such a list of partners, without the need for a separate “Global Links” database.

V. **MU should provide resources necessary to manage international agreements.**

The Task Force found that consulting, drafting, reviewing and monitoring of international agreements requires significant staff time for effective engagement and support of MU academic divisions and other key stakeholders. In order to maintain and improve the management, and hence the quality, of MU’s international agreements, the Task Force recommends that appropriate staff and financial resources be directed to supporting the Office of the Vice Provost for International Programs, International Center Director and the IMOU Review Committee. The Task Force recognizes that in the current fiscal environment this may initially mean redirecting some staff effort and, when appropriate and feasible, dedicating new staff resources to this important process.
Summary and Conclusion

International linkages at MU provide important benefits to students, faculty, staff, and to the citizens of Missouri. These include research opportunities, student experiences, leveraging and sharing of resources, economic development and competitiveness, and cooperation and mutual understanding. Successful linkages may require substantial time, effort, and resources. The Task Force also found that linkages that aren’t well-considered may not align with strategic priorities or produce intended benefits, and may even create unintended inefficiencies and distributed costs.

Over a course of nine months, the Task Force conducted a careful review of MU’s current processes regarding international linkages, considered best practices at peer institutions, and generated and discussed ideas for improvement. The Task Force found that clarification, standardization, and centralization of the processes at MU will likely result in even greater benefits while minimizing potential problems. To help accomplish this, the Task Force respectfully urges adoption of the recommendations summarized in this report.
Appendices


2. International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) Review Committee Charter
Appendix 1

Handbook for International MOUs: Step-By-Step Guide for Planning International Linkage Agreements
Appendix 2

International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) Review
Committee Charter