

Student Mobility Procedures Manual Development Strategy for International Offices in Universities

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Abstract:

Background: Policies reflect the rules guiding the implementation of the organizational process. Procedures, on the other hand, represent an implementation of policy and need to be responsive to the changing work environment over time as new tools emerge, new processes are designed, and the risks associated with an area change in response to internal or external environmental changes. This paper aimed to come up with a strategy for developing a student mobility procedures manual for an international office in a university.

Materials and Methods: In this paper content analysis was used to analyze the activities carried out in the life cycle of student mobility from recruitment and selection to credits transfer and post mobility evaluation.

Results: The categorized student mobility activities into four broad categories of recruitment and selection; pre-travel; arrival, stay, and departure; and after mobility. The paper suggested a student mobility procedures manual development approach that uses five work packages of international office staff capacity building; procedures manual development; operationalization; quality control and monitoring; and dissemination.

Conclusion: The ultimate goal for a procedure document is for the design to be simple, consistent, and easy to use. To ensure a consistent format between documents, the university needs to develop a manual template to help the writers of the procedures get started. The guidelines in this paper can be very useful in structuring and compiling the manual content. The paper emphasizes stakeholder engagement in the entire lifecycle of the procedures manual.

Key Word: International office; student mobility; procedures manual;

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I. Introduction

The ultimate desire of an International Office in a university is to have efficient staff, effective communication, and growth. The more the university and office grows, the harder it gets to effectively communicate, and the more difficult it becomes to ensure that staff carries out their tasks efficiently aligned with the objectives of the office. The success of the International Office is significantly influenced by rules and guidelines to manage staff for a smooth workflow. These rules and guidelines are packaged as policies and procedures manual.

Every International Office needs policies and procedures manual to guide its operations, strategy, and workflow. Where policies set the expectation for staff behaviors, the procedures outline the steps for it. This ensures consistency in practice and helps in maintaining quality output. Policies and procedures are designed to regulate all major decisions, actions, and principles of an organization. This paper focuses on the Student Mobility Procedures Manual, (SMPM). Where student mobility is defined as the incoming or outgoing of students within the country or across the border for education [1].

Office procedures manual documents the administrative functions necessary for an office to operate efficiently. It is derived from policy documents and has daily, monthly and yearly procedures. It is a detailed and sequential action to be executed to operate and includes an identification of the personnel responsible for the required steps. For International offices, procedures include managing student mobility, faculty mobility, and international research.

A well-designed office procedures manual provides many benefits to the office. Buggy [2] emphasizes the importance of the office procedures manual as a management tool that acts as a guide for executing organizational tasks and provides documentation on how office work is intended to be done. The manual is not only instrumental in staff training but also acts as an information repository. A well-managed office procedures manual also serves as an office archive by providing records of organizational changes over time [2]. The paper is guided by two objectives of identifying core activities of the student mobility process and developing a strategy of designing a student mobility manual for international offices in a university.

II. Literature Review

The existence of procedures has been around for the last century. Early procedures were in form of lists on papers whose intended use in all cases was not to always guide the successful performance of a task but to instead, determine how long it should take, and cost, to perform that task [3]. A well-designed office procedures manual helps provide clear protocols for consistency in an organization. Because the policies and procedures manual becomes the avenue to hold people accountable, it is important to craft the policies consistently in format and tone.

The ultimate purpose of the procedures manual today is to ensure that all staff is performing their job roles in the same way, which is needed for the condition to get expected output from the process. To achieve the stated purpose, it is highly recommended that the development of the procedures manual be led by subject-matter experts who know the processes and the structure of the organization [4]. The quality of the document can be enhanced by engaging stakeholders.

To ensure the developments are legitimate and do transfer into internationalization culture, the procedure manual needs to start from a bottom-up approach to enable the IOs staff to integrate elements of internationalization into the structure and culture of the International Office.

The process of developing a procedures manual needs to follow an institutional set procedure which is normally found in the quality assurance offices. Most universities have quality assurance offices that initiate, enhance and support educational effective processes to ensure quality programs [5] [6].

Developing a workable, efficient, and sustainable SMPM requires a vast amount of knowledge and information that is held by stakeholders. This calls for participatory planning that requires the engagement of concerned stakeholders. As used in this paper, engagement refers to the approach to gathering input or contribution from stakeholders toward the development of SMPM [7]. The engagement of stakeholders also ensures that public concerns and values are incorporated in the process of developing the SMPM. The stakeholders should be engaged at all the phases of the SMPM development. Generally, the phases consist of agenda-setting, analysis, manual formation, implementation, and manual review and evaluation [8].

The process of stakeholder engagement often begins stakeholder needs assessment which involves understanding their interests, values, concerns, and perspectives, as well as assessing their relative influence and power on the procedures manual.

Given the crucial role of stakeholder engagement in SMPM development such as sharing a common understanding and involvement in the decision-making process, the selection of relevant stakeholders needs to be given serious consideration. The prioritization process can be used to where stakeholders can be categorized as vital, important, and nice [9]. Where vital are those whose contributions are required for the success of the SMPM and important are those involved for practical reasons while nice are those who can be involved if time and/or resources allow.

The next step after the identification of relevant stakeholders in the development of criteria for the selection of an engagement strategy. Some of the factors that can be taken into account in determining the best engagement approaches are time, budget, geographical location of the stakeholders, range of stakeholder perspective, number of stakeholders, the extent to which stakeholders are familiar with student mobility among others [9]. These considerations can be used as guidelines in determining if it makes sense to engage stakeholders in person or virtually and which engagement methods— individual meetings, group meetings, or surveys are best-suited to the prevailing circumstances.

The development phase starts with the creation of the team to develop the SMPM. As highlighted in the literature review, the team needs to be led by a subject matter expert, in this case, the in-charge of the International Office referred to in this paper as the Project Team Leader (PTL). The PL can work with a small team that comes from the international office. The mandate of the team is to coordinate the development of the manual in liaison with other relevant university organs.

Notable university organs that can be engaged in the development process are the International Office advisory committee (IOAC), the deans' committee, the senate, the quality assurance office, the university management board, and any other body in line with a particular university's management structure. At all stages of the development, there should be regular interaction between the PL and the IOAC as a way of enhancing quality. An advisory committee is a group of volunteers that meets regularly on a long-term basis to provide advice and/or support to an institution or one of its subunits [10] [11].

The key stakeholders in the development of the SMPM are the International Office staff, IOAC, university academic staff, university administrative staff, internationalization experts, international collaborating institutions, students, and parents. These stakeholders should be engaged throughout the SMPM lifecycle.

The use of the procedures manual as a quality management system (QMS) tool cuts across many disciplines, and as such their structures and content are varied. However, there are key components that define a well-designed procedures manual. The International Organization for Standards, (ISO) identifies the purpose, the officer responsible for maintaining and performing the task, the method, the tools needed to perform the

process, and the process output as the key elements of a procedures manual [12][5]. ESDI Internationalization Handbook lists the main objective, motivation, stakeholders, description of the process, related processes, process manager(s), outcomes, and version/author as the elements of a procedures manual [13]. Some authors recommend the use of templates to maintain uniformity with policies [14]. The content and structure of the manual need not be the same across the many areas of application, but they should contain adequate content that flows well and is in line with the type of the organization and their established documentation format.

III. Methods

Content analysis was used to collect information on student mobility activities. Student mobility calendars and literature reviews were used to compile information that needed to go into the procedure manual. Calendars were reviewed for monthly and yearly tasks and actions necessary to complete these activities on the record.

Once the content was pulled together, the information was organized into categories that give the manual a structure. A manual outline was created to assist in determining where information was to be placed. The manual was divided into sections and topics to include specific information underneath. For consistency with the organizational quality standards and practices, a review process was put in place.

IV. Results for Content of Student Mobility Procedures Manual

The content that goes into a manual is the procedures that are required to execute International Office activities. This paper started by identifying the activities carried out in a typical International Office related to student mobility. The activities were grouped into four broad categories of recruitment and selection, pre-travel, arrival, stay, and departure; and after mobility. Table 1 below shows the activities associated with student mobility in a university's International Office.

Table 1: Activities associated with student mobility in a University International Office

Phase	Activities
Recruitment and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student inquiry • Exchange of communication between Home and host IOs about their current international programs • Host IO clarifies application guidelines and requirements • Home IO receives the application package and forwards it to the student • Student make applications • Home IO sends all the application materials to the Host IO • Host IO reviews application documents • Acceptance letters are sent to the student
Pre-travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa application • Enrolment formalities
Arrival, stay, and departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arrival of students to Host IO • Admission process • Orientation • Students participate in academic activities • Student assessment • Student fills out departure forms as needed for Home IO • Student clearance
After mobility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host IO processes and sends academic results 2. Reporting and Evaluation of the stay of returning students

V. Development of the Manual

This paper recommends six work packages (WP) as a strategy for developing the SMPM. A work package is a building block of the work breakdown structure that allows the project management to define the steps necessary for the completion of the work [15] The WPs can be subdivided into small tasks and be assigned to different members of the manual development team. Each of the WP should have a clear output. The five WPs are:

1. Institutional capacity building
2. Development of SMPM
3. Operationalization of internationalization
4. Quality Control and Monitoring
5. Dissemination

Institutional Capacity Building

The paper recommends capacity building for the International Office staff as the first task in the manual development process. The approach empowers the staff to take ownership of the process and allows them to integrate into the structure and culture of the International Office. In this WP, workshops, and seminars

can be used to train the staff on the concept of policy and procedures manual. Training of the staff in the SMPM development aspect will also help in revising the functions and role of the International Office to embed the new approaches to internationalization. Pre- and post-training surveys could be used to ensure the feedback is integrated into the following activities for effectiveness purposes.

Development of Student Mobility Procedures Manual

This WP prepares general guidelines for the project team to follow in their preparation of the SMPM. Drawing on the guidelines, the team should start the development of SMPM for the International Office. This work package involves the compilation of the content of the SMPM. It starts with compiling a list of student mobility activities right from recruitment and selection to departure, credits transfer, and post mobility evaluation. The identified activities are evaluated in terms of objectives, scope, main objective, motivation, stakeholders, description of the process, related processes, process manager(s), and outcomes. Once developed, the SMPM needs to be discussed broadly with the academic staff, administrative staff, and students for feedback and refinement. To enhance the engagement of stakeholders, raising awareness campaigns need to be organized through in-house training. A post-training survey can be conducted to ensure the target audience does receive the information it is supposed to receive. If need be, after the analysis of the survey results another stakeholder engagement can be conducted with the trained stakeholders to elaborate further on the areas that need deeper explanations and refinement.

Operationalization of SMPM

Workshops and seminars can be used to operationalize the developed SMPM at the International Office level. After the adoption of the SMPM, capacity building and raising awareness evaluation of the manual need to be undertaken. Evaluation can be conducted using a well-designed digital self-evaluation form that generates a convenient outline of various activities and objectives related to student mobility. Quality assurance measures and outcomes are also addressed in the evaluation.

Quality Control and Monitoring

To ensure a smooth flow of the SMPM and continuous enhancement an accurate quality control and monitoring plan and respective tools should be developed. The idea is two-fold: to constantly get feedback from the implementors on the quality of the SMPM organization as well as to conduct a regular review of the documentation to ensure efficient and effective execution of the tasks. The PL should take care of the timely and efficient implementation of the quality control and monitoring (QCM) activities. The major tangible outputs for this WP are the QCM plan and tools, reports on WP implementation, and achievements.

Dissemination

Raising awareness and engagement of all the stakeholders concerned is a prerequisite for SMPM success and sustainability. The PL should create a well-thought-through dissemination strategy that will guarantee the accessibility of the SMPM to the International Office staff whose job role is defined in the manual. This can be achieved by availing both hard and soft copies of the manual to the staff as well as using other channels such as training and workshops.

VI. Discussion

This paper is designed to explain the international office student mobility procedures manual development process to help procedure owners organize their written documentation, and to act as a resource as they navigate the approval process. The paper emphasizes the strong link between procedures and policies. Making explicit this relationship along with how the procedures manual helps the international office achieve its goals or strategic plan helps ensure understanding and compliance.

Procedures manual is developed with the customer/user in mind and well-designed and throughout procedures provide benefits to the procedure users. To ensure a sense of ownership among procedure users, this paper recommends stakeholders engagement throughout the procedure manual lifecycle.

The use of sound and responsive quality control and monitoring mechanism can result in a procedures manual that is understandable. Procedures should be written so that what needs to be done can be easily followed by all users. The format of the procedures manual can be derived from the particular university's formatting style.

VII. Conclusion

It is hoped that this paper in one way or another will help international office procedures writers in developing quality procedures manual.

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