Thank you, Don, for that lovely introduction. I feel indeed privileged to have been chosen for the after-dinner slot. And because we are at the end of a long and certainly stimulating day, I will keep my remarks as lively and as brief, as possible.

Having spent the better part of my academic career in international education, I have learned one very important lesson over the years.

That as interconnected as the world has become...it is still only a vast collection of local populations and customs...languages and experiences. With very different standards of living and systems of government.

Yet while this tremendous diversity makes the global exchange of ideas and perspectives so incredibly exciting and meaningful....it is also what perpetuates the many economic, political, and ethnic barriers that continue to limit that exchange.

So it stands to reason that for global education to succeed in fulfilling its mission, it cannot merely transcend borders. It must cross them, as well...to create what I like to call culture full learning environments and experiences.

At my own University of Maryland University College, we are disciples of the think globally, act locally school of thought...always invoking this philosophy as our benchmark in developing effective global education models and strategies. So tonight, I would like to share with you just a few of our success stories.

As the largest public university in the United States, UMUC is also a truly international enterprise...with divisions on four continents and more than 90,000 students in 28 countries. Not surprisingly then, we have invested heavily in technology to provide world-class academic programs and services that are not only multi-cultural and multi-generational, but accessible and affordable, as well.
In fact, UMUC uses its ever-expanding virtual campus to forge strategic alliances with academic institutions and private organizations in many other parts of the world. What's more, these collaborative efforts truly exemplify global thinking through local action, by offering an overseas learning experience...without the four-year price tag.

One of the most successful of these ventures is our longstanding joint degree program with two Russian universities. After completing this five-year program...partially on campus and partially online...Russian students receive two degrees….one in international economics from their home university and a bachelor of science in business and management from UMUC.

Besides the opportunity to study at a distance with students from around the world...our Russian exchange group enjoys full access to UMUC's extensive online library...along with face-to-face classes taught by visiting professors. And if family finances permit, these students also have the option of spending a residential semester or two with us on our American campus in Maryland.

UMUC recently pioneered a similar agreement with the Higher School of Insurance and Finance in Bulgaria...the very first private institution of higher education there...to provide a four-year, dual-degree program in finance.

This online option makes it possible for Bulgarian students to obtain a first-rate international education without ever leaving home. And upon graduating, they will enter the workforce with both a global perspective on finance and a highly coveted proficiency in business English.

In addition to academic institutions, we are also cultivating alliances with like-minded overseas corporations, such as STI in Taiwan. Working through this partnership, UMUC enrolls highly accomplished Taiwanese business executives and public servants in its Doctor of Management program...one of only a few in the world.

These distinguished men and women begin their studies at UMUC with an intensive one-week residency program in Maryland...where they have an opportunity to observe first-hand a variety of carefully selected management practices that may be adapted to their own work settings. And upon returning to Taiwan, they continue their studies online, as well as face-to-face with visiting UMUC faculty members.
Of course, it's one thing to develop these programs...but it's quite another to make them work for the broadly diverse students they serve. So technology allows us to support the global exchange, while at the same time localizing the learning environment...something that is far more difficult to achieve in the conventional face-to-face setting.

For example, in designing culturally sensitive classrooms, our course developers replace standard icons and menus with locally familiar words and symbols...and incorporate locally-relevant case studies, textbooks, and data.

And to establish common ground, we use social networking technologies to build easily expandable, online communities of practice...connecting thousands of learners...in literally every corner of the world...to create meaningful knowledge and develop new forms of understanding.

Local language is yet another challenging issue on the global education horizon...and one that can be costly to address. But there are some promising initiatives underway...a few of which have proven fairly inexpensive to implement, with the help of technologies that are relatively common...even in the developing world.

One of my favorites is a Web-based program called Speak2Me...created by the Ladder Publishing Company in Taipei...at a cost of only $50,000 US dollars. Using both audio chat and text messaging capabilities, American instructors teach conversational English to learners in Taiwan....while bilingual Taiwanese instructional assistants translate and clarify, as needed.

The idea is to provide plenty of informal opportunities to speak English, by swapping stories, talking about world affairs, and exchanging practical information. In addition, the text messaging function encourages learners to write in English...using a variety of group-generated and locally customized emoticons to convey feeling and expression.

Even more important, this website has become a robust, cross-cultural community of practice...allowing teachers and learners to share effective learning strategies...explore diverse cultural traditions...and develop close friendships from literally thousands of miles away.
At UMUC, we are also re-engineering academic programs and curricula around local issues and interests...particularly among business education students we serve in developing nations.

As these countries begin in earnest to strengthen their infrastructures, modernize their living conditions, and upgrade their information systems...they need project managers and information technology experts...who are also good listeners, consensus builders, and team players.
So in addition to standard business fare...their students are looking for programs that offer management specializations in construction and engineering....and emphasize so-called soft business skills...like leadership, entrepreneurship, interpersonal communication, human resource development, and customer service.

And because business cultivation skills are critical to success...these students also need coursework in crisis decision-making...ethics and corporate responsibility...social innovation...and organizational change theory.

Conversely, UMUC collaborates with academic institutions in other parts of the world to ensure that specific programs reflect a broader global perspective. For example, Carl von Ossietsky University of Oldenburg...a leading German institution with extensive experience in distance education....contributes a certificate and several courses to our popular online Master of Distance Education degree program.

Likewise, we have joined forces with Athabasca University in Canada and Tec de Monterrey in Mexico to form the North American Alliance of Innovative Universities....a think tank of sorts...designed to generate distance education opportunities that are both intellectually demanding and globally relevant.

The goal is to create and deliver a series of jointly sponsored graduate education programs around global entrepreneurship and sustainable development...which will be offered fully online...with each school providing specific courses within a mutually agreed upon curriculum.

And given that these universities represent three distinct regions of the continent...with their own unique cultural identities...I have no doubt that our cooperative effort will result in a wealth of different perspectives, around a variety of common challenges.
Aside from its many technology-enhanced global education strategies, UMUC uses a faculty development model that has proven especially effective in building the university's international community of scholars. That said, we recruit a significant number of our full-time professors from among the growing number of scholar-practitioners...who as renowned academics and recognized experts in their fields...have taught and worked all over the world.

Bob Goodwin is one such example….an exceptional business education professor, who also happens to be the university’s resident expert on the Chinese business environment.

Bob began his love affair with Asian culture and commerce back to the 1960s…when he served a three-year stint in the Peace Corps, doing development work in rural Thailand. An experience that not only taught him a great deal about building cross-cultural relationships…but also inspired a career in international law...working for a medical equipment sales company doing business in China. As a member of the company’s legal team, Bob witnessed first-hand that country’s evolution from a government-dominated business environment to a private sector one…managing several hundred Chinese employees through the process.

You can well imagine, then, what a remarkable asset he has been to our university…first as an adjunct faculty member…and now as the program director for international management in the business and executive programs department.

Not only does Bob draw on examples from his own career...he also uses his extensive network of global contacts to organize "field trips" overseas...where his students gain valuable experience, working on local business projects...in places like Argentina, Hungary, India, and China.

Our faculty members also share their unique American perspectives as visiting scholars in a variety of foreign universities. In fact, I just received an email from a colleague at Universitas Terbuka in Indonesia...commending one of UMUC's own...Dr. Clarence Mann...who has spent the last several weeks in Jakarta providing lectures and seminars on global business development to both staff and graduate students.

And according to our colleagues there, his visit has been a highly successful one...which will likely result in a similar arrangement online with faculty from Terbuka. What's more, we are exploring additional opportunities for joint research and publication.
It goes without saying that cross-cultural exchange has enriched us immensely at UMUC...both collectively and individually. And given the university's unique mission, we continue to explore innovative ways to expand and refine our global education efforts...particularly those that have flourished, thanks to the wonders of technology.

Of course, I would be remiss not to acknowledge that the digital divide is still an unfortunate reality in many parts of the world. But it is also slowly closing...as more than one billion people around the world now claim access to the Internet.

So I welcome this chance to further the dialogue...and hope that I have inspired at least a few new avenues for collaboration...online or otherwise. Because I truly believe that by leveraging both our ingenuity and our resources, we can remove most of the barriers that still stand in our way.

And in doing so, empower our students to conquer the difficult challenges we all face as citizens of this great global village.

Thank you.

Susan C. Aldridge, Ph.D.
President
University of Maryland University College
3501 University Boulevard East
Adelphi, Maryland 20783