Higher education institutions have become tasked with preparing their graduates for entering an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. In this paper, we present comprehensive internationalization as one viable solution. We situate this solution within the unique contexts of small liberal arts institutions and the opportunities and barriers they face. Using a case study approach, this paper highlights how two small liberal arts institutions—Mount Holyoke College and Albion College—have embraced and enacted internationalization on their respective campuses. This paper examines the processes and products of their diverse approaches to internationalization, as well as some relative impacts of these strategies. We conclude with a series of best practices in internationalization for liberal arts institutions.

Keywords: comprehensive internationalization, liberal arts institutions

International educator Madeleine Green (2005b) states the following in regard to what she considers the international imperative: “It is now a truism that American college graduates will live and work in a world in which national borders are permeable; information and ideas flow at lightning speed; and communities and workplaces reflect a growing diversity of cultures, languages, attitudes, and values” (p. 7). Green’s words, now twelve years old, highlight the still-important notion of embracing internationalization in American higher education. Internationalization is defined as “a commitment, confirmed through action, to integrate international, global, and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education” (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). At the time of Green’s imperative in 2005\(^1\), 49% of liberal arts colleges scored “medium” on a composite internationalization scale administered by the American Council on Education (ACE); 20% scored “medium-high” and only 1% of them scored “high” (Green & Siaya, 2005). In comparison, research institutions received scores of 34% (“medium”), 54% (“medium high”), and 2% (“high”) (Green, 2005a). Internationalization efforts, therefore, must be increased at liberal arts institutions—for ethical, global, and economic reasons.

The above data, though over a decade old, highlights the disparities between internationalization efforts at smaller liberal arts colleges and larger research institutions. While academia could benefit greatly from a follow-up study that measures more current internationalization efforts, this data suggests that, even as early as twelve years ago, research institutions had made significantly greater strides toward internationalization than liberal arts institutions. This paper—using a case study approach of two small liberal arts colleges who have been nationally recognized for their internationalization efforts—seeks to uncover the ways in which some liberal arts institutions have internationalized in response to the struggles they faced, and how these strategies can inform best practices for the future of liberal arts education.

**Literature Review**

It is important to begin by noting that internationalization should not be confused with globalization, though the latter is often a motivation for the former. The globalization of higher education—or the worldwide economic, cultural, and political factors that increasingly influence our lives (Wagner, 2004)—has drastically impacted the ways in which colleges and universities operate (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As society becomes more globalized and information is rapidly exchanged, institutions and organizations are charged with developing adequate responses to new cultures, populations, and ways of

\(^1\) An updated study had not been published as of the time this article was written.
thinking (de Wit, 2009). Thus, the goals, purposes, and functionalities of institutions such as higher education often become redefined (Kwiek, 2010). Internationalization and its many forms is one response that some higher education institutions have adopted.

While internationalization efforts date back to the Middle Ages, internationalization as a deliberate strategic process began around the Cold War era as colleges and universities in the United States scrambled to adapt to new foreign policy and national security concerns, particularly with the Soviet Union (de Wit, 2009). The US and USSR became competing hubs for educational exchange, with each attempting to ascertain deeper understandings of other world cultures and to expand their global influence; higher education institutions in America won the information war, and the US became the world’s leading powerhouse for academic research by the mid-twentieth century (de Wit, 2009). The 1990s marked a discernible shift in internationalization as efforts increasingly became driven by systematic institutional policy (Callan, 2000).

However, policy changes and strategic planning efforts were left with little guidelines for invention and implementation, leading to a disconnect between words and actions among those in positions of power and a misdirection and misunderstanding of the goals of internationalizing the college campus (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). This information gap and an increasing imperative to respond to rapid globalization became the catalyst for what international education experts call comprehensive internationalization. Hudzik and McCarthy (2012) argue that comprehensive internationalization marks a paradigm shift in the scope and scale of how international educators seek to influence institutional changes and engage and mobilize university factions towards change. Comprehensive internationalization includes, but is certainly not limited to: increasing education abroad enrollments; recruiting more diverse students and faculty; changing institutional missions and goals to reflect the needs of a globalized economy; diversifying international course offerings; including multicultural and comparative perspectives in every course, major, and discipline; and providing internationally enriching activities on campus (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012).

Comprehensive internationalization frameworks of several varieties include critical involvement of both macro and micro components, and guide international educators, who often serve as development practitioners on their respective campuses, through the process of engaging and mobilizing campus community members toward comprehensive internationalization. Hudzik (2011) also provided a distilled framework for creating an organizational culture centered on comprehensive internationalization. His four inclusive strategies necessitate the following: 1) visible and consistent leadership from the top, 2) faculty and academic unit engagement internationally, 3) persistence and adaptability, and 4) clear and measurable goals. Hudzik goes on to say that
institutions can foster success by providing small start-up funds for programs and projects and/or awarding units for making significant progress towards institutional goals (2011).

Despite urgent pushes from the Obama Administration (see e.g., USDOS, 2015) and a wealth of step-by-step frameworks such as the ones detailed above, a brief glance at the demographics, program offerings, course descriptions, research projects, and mission statements of many American universities would reveal that there is still considerable work to be done. The American Council on Education’s 2012 survey of internationalization of US campuses revealed major shortfalls in the process across the nation, and noted that immediate action and change was imperative (ACE Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement, 2012). Colleges and universities are not very racially or ethnically diverse: with the majority of degrees—72 to 74%—being conferred to white students, many college campuses are still predominantly uniracial and American (USDOE NCES, 2012). Foreign and domestic students and faculty are not engaging in meaningful ways, with each group often operating inside their respective bubbles. International and multicultural elements of learning are not being adequately incorporated into curricular and extracurricular courses and activities (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012).

Due to America’s growing nationalistic and isolationist tendencies and our inward looking educational systems, we are quickly falling behind other nations, like Canada and Australia, who are readily embracing this challenge (see e.g., Durrani, 2017; Redden, 2017; Smith, 2017). Unfortunately, increases in the globalization of higher education have simultaneously been met with cuts to government funding (Altbach & Knight, 2016), thus leaving many institutions in a conundrum where they must simultaneously expand their missions and offerings while dealing with drastic budgetary shortfalls. In light of recent economic shortcomings and subsequent closures of small liberal arts colleges—Dowling (NY) and Burlington (VT), to name just a few of the more notorious ones—these types of institutions in particular should begin seeking new, innovative avenues for staying afloat. Though usually identified as a way to enhance research and knowledge capacities and to cultivate cross-cultural understandings, many traditional institutions across the world have adopted internationalization as a way to grow their commercial brand (see e.g., Altbach, 2016; Heck & Mu, 2015). The recruitment of international students has also proven to be a successful strategy in many cases (Qiang, 2003). However, in some cases, and unlike their often-wealthier research counterparts, smaller liberal arts institutions have found it difficult to adapt to this changing culture of academe. The unstable global and national economy, changing student demands, and a shifting student population (among countless other factors) have all contributed to the demise of many American liberal arts colleges and their struggles with embracing the international imperative.
Some liberal arts colleges, however, have been able to successfully embrace the international imperative. Common approaches to internationalization taken by liberal arts institutions include recruiting more diverse students and faculty, an increasing focus on education abroad, changing institutional missions and goals to reflect the needs of a globalized economy, diversifying international course offerings, including multicultural and comparative perspectives in every course, major, and discipline, and providing internationally enriching activities on campus (Siaya & Hayward, 2003). While such traditional approaches to internationalization typically do not drive profits for the institutions that implement them, they often enhance their prestige, visibility, competitiveness, and cross-border relationships (Altbach & Knight, 2016).

Liberal arts colleges face unique challenges to internationalization. As other countries do not have the same liberal arts tradition as America and place higher values on research rankings, liberal arts institutions in the US—with their small faculty, focus on teaching as opposed to research, and largely undergraduate populations—are often seen as less desirable options for students and scholars from other cultures (Brewer, 2010). However, as Harari (1992) reminds us, the liberal arts tradition is rooted in the “liberation of the mind” (p. 53) and that increasing global awareness and developing understandings of diverse cultures is an inseparable part of a liberal arts education. Therefore, American academe and liberal arts institutions in particular are charged with implementing internationalization efforts to respond to the growing forces of globalization, economic competition, and the maintenance of their original missions.

**Dual Case Study Analysis**

Using a case study approach, we investigate how two small liberal arts institutions have embraced and enacted internationalization practices. These institutions reflect some of the diversity of liberal arts colleges as well as the different ways in which such institutions choose to internationalize. We examine the processes and products of internationalization as well as the apparent impact of these strategies. Finally, stemming from these two case studies we propose a series of best practices for liberal arts institutions moving forward.

Each of these institutions has been chosen for analysis because they were both recently recipients of NAFSA’s Simon Awards for Internationalization. Named in honor of the late Senator Paul Simon (D-Illinois)—a Congressional champion of study abroad\(^2\)—these awards recognize institutions for notable

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\(^2\) Simon supported 2007 legislation that would appropriate $80 million annually in an effort to boost study abroad participation in non-traditional locations (Ogden, 2008). As of this writing, the legislation remains dormant.
advances in internationalization processes. The Senator Paul Simon Award for Comprehensive Internationalization “recognizes institutions for overall excellence in internationalization efforts as evidenced in practices, structures, philosophies, and policies” (NAFSA, 2016). The Senator Paul Simon Spotlight Award “is presented to institutions with specific innovative international programs or initiatives”. The two awards are presented to a handful of institutions each year—public and private; research, comprehensive, and liberal arts; large and small. Mount Holyoke College (2015 Comprehensive) and Albion College (2014 Spotlight) provide the case studies for our examination of these practices on small liberal arts campuses, highlighting that internationalization is not only for large, wealthy, research-based institutions.

Mount Holyoke College

The oldest continuing college for women, Mount Holyoke holds the distinction of being the first of the Seven Sisters which offered quality education when discrimination prevailed and admission to the Ivy League was refused to females (Thelin, 2014). A higher education institution’s route to internationalization reflects its history, values, mission, and also its current needs. For Mount Holyoke, the focus on internationalization has been driven by a focus on the future: remaining relevant as a woman’s college in the 21st century and assuring students that the college is able to offer a high Return on Investment (ROI) (Carapezza, 2013). The college’s mission statement includes the clause, “to prepare students, through a liberal education integrating curriculum and careers, for lives of thoughtful, effective, and purposeful engagement in the world;” the statement underlies the importance this private selective college places on internationalization (Mount Holyoke Mission, 2016d). Mount Holyoke’s path to internationalization is embedded in remaining marketable while reaffirming its tradition of valuing community and women’s education: Mt. Holyoke depicts an institution’s capacity to grasp the potential of intercultural exchange that portrays the value of community in the local and global sense.

Located in the historic town of South Hadley, Massachusetts, the residential college is ranked at 35 amongst national liberal arts colleges by U.S News and World Report (USNWR, 2016). The college has a reported enrollment of 2,189 students who represent 74 countries and 45 states; 25% of the student body are international, and 27% of domestic students are African American, Native American, Asian American, Latina, or mixed race (Mt. Holyoke Fast Facts, 2016c). Mount Holyoke’s understanding of internationalization as both a reaffirmation and reification of the construct of the ‘global village’ explains its path in becoming a leader in internationalization.

Holyoke’s achievement of creating global communities is a process that started at its inception when its founder, Mary Lyon, created a place of quality
Higher education for women to call home (Thelin, 2014). The notion of international travel for women to spread ideas was invoked early on in the college’s history and teachings. As a woman who had risen from poverty to begin the college as a women’s seminary in 1837, Lyon’s stance on women’s education was both provocative and traditional. She believed in the idea of “Republican Motherhood,” and the role of education in engendering better mothers, yet she also demanded that women’s education be a public concern (Porterfield, 1997, p.11). Moreover, she asked of her graduates: "Go where no one else will go, do what no one else will do" (Mt. Holyoke History, 2016b). During Lyon’s tenure as leader of Mount Holyoke, these words of women’s empowerment were layered within Lyon’s “missionary zeal,” the influence of which caused many early Mount Holyoke alumni to become missionaries in Persia, India, and Southeast Africa to create communities of Christianity and sisterhood (Porterfield, 1997).

In the 20th century, as doors started to open for women’s prospects in higher education, Mount Holyoke continued participating in the community in an institutional capacity—thus, community and interconnections have remained a cornerstone throughout the college’s history. In 1965, Mount Holyoke became part of the five-college consortium which includes Amherst, College, Hampshire College, Smith College, and UMass-Amherst. These participatory actions most likely set important precedents far before globalization became a ‘buzzword,’ depicting the college’s tenacity for recreating communal spaces of dialogue. Thus, the college’s historical role as an enlightened institution through its commitment to women’s right to quality education is partly reflective of its current progressive role of paving the path to internationalization.

As interest in women’s colleges declines, it is increasingly necessary for these institutions to react to a changing landscape of college admissions through new strategies to attract both domestic and international students (Carapezza, 2013). Mount Holyoke has employed a multi-prong strategy for internationalization including strengthening study abroad programs, committing to international internships and research, recruiting international students, solidifying partnerships through hosting conferences including video conferencing, and attracting experts to hold the position of global scholars in residence. The college’s increased visibility to international students increased the percentage of these students from 16% in 2006 to 27% in 2015, providing tangible evidence of this phenomenon in progress (Mount Holyoke Detailed Admissions Statistics: 2006-2015, 2016a). The college’s use of innovative technology to increase its “international scope” and improve the “international experiences of its students” was recognized through the award, “Leaders in Internationalization Through Technology Award” (“Leading Internationalization”). In particular, Mount Holyoke’s program, “Deepening Global Learning Through Virtual Collaborations: The Learning Across Borders Initiative,” creates impetus for faculty to use videoconferencing to communicate
with international partners in courses that are geared towards global issues, foreign languages, and cultures; through this technological collaboration, Mount Holyoke aims to better prepare its students’ understanding of complex global issues and also advance their career opportunities in a global marketplace (Carapezza, 2013).

In light of increasing global competition in higher education, Mount Holyoke’s comprehensive strategies for internationalization have represented not only a safety net for the college’s finances but also rebranding the college to offer a modern curriculum that is aligned with the notion of today’s college students being members of a global village. In 2013, the college mounted a new campaign called ‘never fear/ change’, a rebranding movement created to appeal to a new globalized community as a legacy and a promise of Mount Holyoke. The college notes, “the never fear / change’ campaign honors our history while challenging the College, the community, and all who engage with Mount Holyoke to be self-aware, future focused, and optimistic” (Mt. Holyoke Never fear/ change, 2013). Although Mount Holyoke asserts that an international outlook has always been part of its history, the broad actions that have repositioned the college in the face of global challenges allow it to remain relevant and meaningful during changing times.

Albion College

Nestled along the banks of the North Branch of the Kalamazoo River, Albion College is a residential campus in Southern Michigan whose 1,382 students comprise 16% of the small town’s total population. The college was founded in 1835 and offers 49 majors and concentrations and four pre-professional programs in law, engineering, social work, and medicine (Albion College, 2016). Serving a largely local population, Albion ranks 122nd in U.S. News and World Report’s Top American Liberal Arts Colleges (USNWR, 2016) and was recently recognized by the Princeton Review and the Sierra Club for its efforts in environmental sustainability (Albion, 2016). Yet, despite its modest rankings and recognition, Albion has landed itself on Forbes’ list of “endangered” colleges; even with its decent state-wide reputation, “mid-quality” schools like Albion often find it tough to compete with cheaper and more attractive flagship state schools (Vedder, 2016).

Like Mount Holyoke, Albion has used internationalization as a way to forge its path. Albion’s decades old internationalization activities have focused heavily on cross-border partnerships. The strong connection between the two communities of Albion, Michigan and Noisy-le-Roi in France dates back to the Second World War when an American soldier from Michigan, seeking to rekindle friendships traveled back to his former military post in the small French town (NAFSA, 2014). Albion has played a large role in the small town ever
since, and in 1999 the campus administration established a formal partnership with the French municipality. These “Sister Cities” now constitute a formal, close relationship—one the cities hope will serve as a model for other small liberal arts institutions—that has led to increased exchanges for middle and high school students, university students, interns, and even senior citizens and government officials of the respective communities (Albion College, 2014).

Albion President Mauri Ditzler, in an interview with Jolene Koester, former president of CSU-Northridge, commented that the most unique and important aspect of Albion’s international sister city partnership is its intimate tie to the communities themselves. Ditzler noted that so many of the Midwestern liberal arts colleges that have popped up in recent decades were forged with a commitment to community engagement, support, and development—”to build quality of life” (NAFSA, 2014). Having an established international sister city relationship, which serves to reciprocally boost the local economies and promote the exchange of foreign cultures, allows Albion to simultaneously promote international ideals across campus and throughout the local community it seeks to serve.

Ditzler also noted the “energizing” influence that the Simon Award has had on faculty across the institution (NAFSA, 2014), and added that this international partnership has prompted Albion faculty to internationalize in other ways. Aside from increased interaction with Albion’s sister cities, the faculty have made great strides in promoting internationalization in their courses and with relationships to other countries. For example, some departments—like chemistry and Spanish—share graduate assistants in an effort to provide students in non-language majors with an applied language experience. They have established and facilitated team-taught classes among professors in several countries, and internships with the US Ambassador to Suriname. Additionally, first-year students now have the opportunity to visit an Albion-funded-and-constructed Cameroonian school. Albion’s education department is also currently working to expand its international partnership practices and teaching practicum to the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (Albion College, 2014).

**Discussion**

As evidenced through this dual case study analysis, there is no one way to internationalize a college campus. Mount Holyoke’s rebranding strategy, coupled with revamped study abroad programming, robust international student recruitment efforts, and innovative use of technology has raised its institutional profile globally. Albion College’s cross-border partnerships allow Albion students to engage with other cultures and has led to a redefining of community—extending it from Albion itself to communities around the world. Mount Holyoke and Albion, and their respective efforts, represent only a small
portion of how comprehensive internationalization can be effectively implemented at small liberal arts institutions. Numerous other liberal arts colleges and universities have implemented policies and practices with similar aims, but there is work still to be done.

Green and Siaya (2005) have identified some of the most likely strategies used by liberal arts colleges in their internationalization efforts. The most highly internationalized colleges seek external, private funding for internationalization efforts (like development grants), have offices and campus task forces designated for promoting internationalization practices and policies, weave internationalization into the mission and values of the institution, and have vibrant study abroad program offerings and wide participation amongst students and faculty (Green & Siaya, 2005). Other popular strategies include: earmarking funds for faculty to develop and lead study abroad programs; offering international festivals and cross-cultural events on campus; highlighting international education in recruitment literature; and funding faculty to travel internationally for meetings and conferences. Internationalization efforts at liberal arts institutions could be improved through: increasing faculty support for internationalizing their courses; establishing guidelines that promote international work in faculty promotion and tenure reviews; funding student international travel to conferences; and more purposefully integrating domestic and international students inside and outside of the classroom (Green & Siaya, 2005). And perhaps most importantly, to further highlight the need and benefits of internationalization, researchers, educators, and policy analysts should continue to track the implementation and impact of internationalization efforts—at liberal arts colleges and across postsecondary education more broadly (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Conclusion

The international imperative (Green, 2005b) is among us, and it is a task suited not only for the institutions with the largest enrollments, or endowments. Liberal arts institutions, like all others, have a responsibility to contribute to the generation and circulation of ideas in the global marketplace and to break down barriers between nations and peoples. In addition to these global-level impacts, internationalization also yields opportunities for institutional economic prosperity, can create greater institutional visibility and reach, and can provide viable alternatives to closure during difficult economic times. Our nation’s small liberal arts colleges—from the prominent Mount Holyokes to the Albions with more local reach—can help pave the way for the removal of borders in academia and open the doors for greater idea exchange and the reflection of our growing societal diversity.
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