Creating a Joint Graduate Program in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

Glen Sparrow Professor Emeritus
School of Public Administration and Urban Studies
San Diego State University
San Diego CA USA 992182-4505
sparrow@sdsu.edu

Abstract: Creating a Joint Graduate Program in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

In response to an RFP for the *U.S.-Mexico Training, Internships, Exchanges, Scholarships (TIES) Partnership* program for USAID, in early spring 2002 a joint application was submitted by San Diego State University and Universidad Autonoma de Baja California proposing a Joint Interdisciplinary Master's Degree in Transborder Public Administration and Governance.

This case study describes and analyzes the pedagogy and process that created and launched the SDSU/UABC program. It describes how a joint Master of Arts degree was created that will educate a generation of border practitioners to address the manner in which governmental agencies can improve delivery of services to border communities and across international boundaries, and, how their effort can enhance the quality of life and promote sustainable development for borderlanders. Specifically, descriptions of curriculum development, the recruitment of students and faculty, the search for and involvement of the Advisory Board, and the methods used to guide the programs through the two university administrations will be discussed. Finally, the case will address what we learned and can share with others who we would encourage to undertake similar endeavors and attempts at binational collaboration.

Creating a Joint Graduate Program in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

About borders, there is this: They define us as well as divide us.
Judy Goldstein Botello

Borders are special places. They have particular conundrums that characterize them, are populated by a distinctive set of inhabitants, and, they pose peculiar problems of policy, service delivery, and infrastructure for those who desire to govern them. This article describes an attempt to identify, recruit, and educate a group of individuals who may become the future policy makers and implementers along in the California-Baja California region of the U.S.-Mexico border. And the accomplishment of this through a project undertaken by San Diego State University and Universidad Autonoma de Baja California to create a joint interdisciplinary master's degree program in transborder public administration and governance

This Case Study describes how a joint Master of Arts degree has been created with the goal of educating a generation of border practitioners to address the manner in which governmental agencies can improve the development and delivery of services to border communities and across international boundaries. This paper also discusses how the effort of the graduates of the program can enhance the quality of life and promote sustainable development for borderlanders. The case discusses the *U.S.-Mexico Training, Internships, Exchanges, Scholarships (TIES) Partnership* program and how the SDSU-UABC proposal created the curriculum of the program, the courses, recruitment of faculty and students, the development of the individual courses, the Advisory Board, and how university approval

was achieved. Finally, the case describes and analyzes what we learned and what we can share with others who we would encourage to undertake similar endeavors.

Historically, international boundaries have denoted a clash of cultures, races, economies and governments. Toward the end of the twentieth century, borders that were formerly barriers to interaction, appeared to change. Due to information exchange, increased international traffic—in both freight and individuals— globalization, and the end of the Cold War, their barrier function diminished. Despite the impact of terrorism and all of its uncertainty most international boundaries still serve as a zone of transition from nation to nation, but this degree of change is becoming less critical and less noticeable. This softening of borders is most apparent with respect to economic differences, but in recent years culture and race have increasingly filtered more easily from nation to nation across international boundaries.

The California-Baja California border, which includes San Diego-Tijuana and Calexico-Mexicali metropolitan areas, has present all of the issues that characterize border regions worldwide. However, the region also has a history of being a point of transfer and exchange of national characteristics due to economic linkages, tourism, and the needs relative to supply and demand of the cities. These regions may even be the North American models for the newly emerging *Global city-region* (Scott). However, even given a relatively long and stable period of interaction, and strong economic

linkages the two sets of cities are still learning to coexist and compliment each other.

The San Diego-Tijuana and Calexico-Mexicali binational regions sit astride the California-Baja California boundary along the western end of the US/Mexico border. It is at the most Southwestern point of the U.S. and the most Northwestern point of Mexico. The significant distance of the region from the national capitals of these two federal republics helps to explain some of the neglect the region has historically experienced from both central governments. Distance also helps to explain the history, economy and independent character of the region. However, when the region is compared to other companion city regions along the U.S.-Mexico border, there emerge similar borderland characteristics.

It was, in part, to address the peculiar issues and special characteristics of border metropolitan regions that a joint graduate program in border governance was initially envisioned. As far back as 1990 informal discussions were being held at San Diego State University (SDSU) in regard to creating a Master's degree in Border Public Policy. This was to be an interdisciplinary degree with courses to be taught on the SDSU campus by University faculty with the degree to be awarded by the University. For numerous reasons the program never grew beyond the discussion stage but the notes and experience from that attempt were resurrected in 2002 when the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) issued a Request For Proposals for the *U.S.-Mexico Training, Internships, Exchanges, Scholarships (TIES) Partnership.*

The TIES program emerged from USAID/Mexico as a result of the *Partnership for Prosperity* program proposed by Presidents Fox and Bush in 2002. The *Partnership* is aimed at both the private sector and, with TIES, higher education. The goal is to further develop joint programs in US and Mexican academic communities through "a major education and training initiative that ties the two countries together to address challenges and opportunities both within the region and globally (ALO, p. 1)." In particular:

> The goals of TIES are to facilitate pursuit of the common agenda for development that is emerging in the U.S.—Mexico bilateral relationship, and to contribute to Mexico's ability to take advantage of opportunities created by NAFTA that will lead to a narrowing of the social and economic gaps between and within Mexico and the United States. TIES benefits many segments of U.S. and Mexico society—higher education institutions; civil society and other non-governmental and community groups; the private sector; and national, state, and local governments (ALO, p. 5).

The response to the RFP was very strong and eventually 35 institutional partnerships between U.S. and Mexican higher education or research institutions were selected. One of these—the only one to propose a joint graduate program—was that offered by San Diego State University and Universidad Autonoma de Baja California.

During the spring of 2002 discussions had been undertaken by SDSU faculty from the School of Public Administration and Urban Studies (SPAUS), assisted by the Director of the Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias (IRSC) with UABC's Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Politicas, assisted by the Director General de Investigacion y Posgrado. It was decided to submit a joint proposal for the TIES program that would propose

the development of "a joint master's degree on governance and public administration for the U.S.-Mexican border region." In the proposal submitted the Program Goals and Objectives were stated:

> The program goal is the development and implementation of a joint Master's of Transborder Public Administration and Governance as a shared effort of UABC and SDSU along with the participation of stakeholders and practitioners on both sides of the border. The objective is to develop a sustainable program, maintained with internal resources of SDSU and UABC, which will train the next generation of pubic administration leaders in the border region (Application).

When informed in the summer of 2002 that the proposal had been selected, the individuals involved from SDSU and UABC began formally preparing a program to start in fall of 2003. Among the first undertakings was the inclusion of faculty from the SDSU Calexico campus and the UABC Tijuana campus on the planning body. By the fall of 2002, Project Coordinators had been hired at both Universities and throughout the period the members of the planning committee and the Project Coordinators met and prepared the Master's curriculum and schedule. Included in the TIES proposal was the creation of an Advisory Board composed of practioners, stakeholders and politicians from both sides of the border. By December 2002 enough of a draft program had been developed that it was felt a presentation to the Advisory Board was in order to vet it before this audience of practical and knowledgeable borderlanders.

A meeting was organized for February 2003 in Tecate BC to accomplish two goals: 1) on Thursday to bring together the potential faculty to further flesh-out specific courses and 2) on Friday make a presentation to the

Advisory Board and allow the members to critique the proposal, the courses, and their content.

By the time of the Tecate meeting the project committee had: established the over-all structure of the degree, outlined the courses, considered the likely makeup of the student body, created a schedule, selected faculty to teach the courses, contacted and invited the borderlanders who would form the Advisory Board, and developed a strategy for getting approval of the program and the courses at the two Universities.

The Tecate meeting included the presentation of this package to the Board and reception of comments and criticisms of these border experts. Following this meeting the project committee considered the comments and revised the program as necessary.

Over the fall and early spring the project committee laid out the program in the following manner:

The curriculum called for constructing a 30 unit Master of Arts degree to be administered, taught and awarded jointly by SDSU and UABC. The ten, three unit courses would be taught jointly by a faculty member from Mexico and the U.S. The courses would be offered on an intensive basis, with each course consisting of six daylong classes, with a two-week break between each two. The days chosen for the classes were Friday and Saturday, these being the most convenient for our busy, multicultural student body. In order to begin the program in the fall of 2003 it was necessary to get all courses adopted through the approval processes on both campuses. At SDSU the

creation of a graduate program took more time than was available for a fall start. The decision was made to create first a Graduate Certificate/ Diplomado of 18 units that could be moved through the SDSU approval process in the spring of 2003 and would take a year to teach. Then, during the next year the additional four courses and the Master of Arts degree would be created and approval sought. Students would move from the Certificate/Diplomado to the MA with no problem. Early in the process a web page was designed and placed in service. Those seeking further information will find it at: < http://psfa.sdsu.edu/transborder/ >

The courses were selected based upon the experience of the project committee and the Advisory Board to meet, in the words of the proposal "The central development problem to be addressed through this program: *How to improve delivery of services to border communities by government agencies in order to enhance quality of life of all residents and to promote sustainable development* (emphasis in original) (Application)." The ten courses selected to accomplish this were:

1. Introductory Seminar in Transborder Public Administration and Governance
2. Seminar in Comparative Federalism: Mexico and the U.S.
3. Seminar in Comparative Fiscal Structures: Mexico and the U.S.
4. Environmental Administration and Management in the Transborder Region
5. Transnational Criminal Justice in Mexico and the U.S.
6. Practicum in Border Research (This would be the concluding project for the Certificate/Diplomado in the first iteration but would be moved to the conclusion of the ten course sequence for the MA.)
7. Land use/Development Issues Along the US-Mexico International Boundary
8. Methods in Transborder Research

9. Current Transborder Public Policy Issues
10. Public Management On the US-Mexico Border

With a multinational student body that was mature, working, spread along both sides of a two hundred mile border distributing course reading materials and keeping in touch proved to be a problem. The solution was to use servers in both Universities to post readings and messages electronically. This proved to be a significant tool in the distribution of course material and maintaining communication with a diverse group of students.

The students were the great unknowns as the program was being developed. The project committee spent a good deal of time attempting to anticipate who would step forward once the program began recruiting. But, due to time considerations the project committee had to use its collective knowledge of the border—with additional assistance from members of the Advisory Board—to create a program that would be relevant and—hopefully—attractive to the potential students. It was expected that they would be mature, mid-level professionals primarily from the public sector but with some representation of the private not-for-profit sector. It was hoped that there would be some private sector representation, as well. It was decided that the students would be recruited separately from both sides of the border, with the ideal class to include ten students from each side. The students would need to be bilingual and would have to meet the qualifications of both Universities as to eligibility for admission to graduate school. They would proceed through the program as a cohort and the program would start anew each fall.

The schedule was established in the Friday-Saturday, two week off pattern and since there were delays in getting underway at first it was relatively easy to adjust. A survey of Mexican and U.S. holidays, university vacation schedules, etc. was conducted to make sure that they were taken into consideration and the schedule was finalized and made available to interested students. Each Friday and Saturday sequence would be held in the same location. While it had been decided that the classes should be held in different locations along the border no locations were identified in the primary schedule. It was decided, instead, to allow the faculty for each course to establish the locations. After the first course it became clear that students needed more specific location information and for the latter courses locations were determined and included in the schedule. All classes were held on UABC or SDSU campuses. It turned out to be impossible to schedule specific rooms (or even buildings) as the university administrators—on either side of the border—could not provide specific locations until shortly prior to the classes.

The faculty was selected primarily from the School of Public Administration and Urban Studies SDSU and UABC's Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Politicas. Additional faculty was recruited from the Tijuana campus of El Coligio de la Fronteria Norte (COLEF). The individuals were offered the opportunity to create the courses and to teach them. Money was available from the USAID grant to pay for the course creation but the grant money could not be used for paying to teach the courses. That money would have to come from the tuition charged for the courses. Here the project committee faced directly one of the asymmetry issues that border scholars describe and this one was economic. Salaries are higher on the U.S. side of the

border and lower on the Mexican side. In order to meet the U.S. cost tuition would have to be higher than what most Mexican students could afford. The solution, proposed Director General Torres was for each side to pay its faculty and establish the necessary tuition to do this. An interesting point is the obvious simplicity and practicality of the solution. But it came about largely because the members of the project committee had worked together for over a year and had developed a trust that allowed for an obvious binational solution that did not need to raise questions of superiority or inferiority of economic or political systems.

The Advisory Board members were recruited from among a group of knowledgeable, borderlanders who had been engaged in the California-Baja California border for a number of years. The nominees came from among the large number of border experts that the project committee members and others close to the project could identify. The Mexican members were chosen by the Mexican members of the project committee and the U.S members by the SDSU members of the committee. There are 21 members and they include, on the California side: a member of the State Senate, California Environmental Protection Agency, representatives of cities and counties, regional bodies, Native American tribal groups, and non-governmental organizations. On the Baja California side are: representatives of the municipios of Mexicali, Tijuana (including the City Manager) and Ensenada, the state of Baja California and the President of the Committee for Border Afairs.

The Advisory Board members were formally and informally consulted on the philosophy and direction of the program as well as on the curriculum. They spent a day with the project committee and faculty discussing these aspects

of the program and offered much constructive criticism and support for the program in the February 2003 meeting in Tecate. The members were also central to the process of student recruitment.

University approval was crucial to the credibility and quality of the program. Both universities were skeptical of a program offering a joint graduate degree that would be offered, in an intensive format, on both sides of the border, and be taught by faculty not necessarily of the home university. Fortunately, strong support from the highest levels of both Universities was forthcoming once the program was explained and faculty and institutional support on both campuses was produced. An example of the high levels of support was the November 7, 2003 event that brought together Dr. Alejandro Mungaray Lagarda, Rector of UABC and Dr. Stephen Weber, President of SDSU to sign a formal Sub-Agreement to the UABC-SDSU Memorandum of Understanding.

At SDSU suspicion of the quality of Mexican higher education still lurks in some of the less enlightened segments of the campus. It required leadership at the highest levels and in vital administrative positions, by people who understand the border, Mexico and the importance of SDSU's obligation to binational and multinational education to provide the support necessary to launch and sustain the program.

What did we learn and what can we share with others who we would encourage to undertake similar endeavors.

• The presence of binational friendships and the trust they engender, built up over long periods, are critical to getting a program of this magnitude started in a timely manner.

• The availability of USAID start-up funding was critical for underwriting crucial costs that are necessary for institutions with limited development money. Being able to invest this money in the undertakings of our Mexican colleagues was also critical.

• The use of the noted binational friendships was crucial to identifying and recruiting the Advisory Committee that in turn was valuable in vetting the program and recruiting students for it.

• In order to undertake the project, legitimize it, develop legal and faculty acceptance and the support of both Universities it was necessary to have the backing which evolved into the partnership of University administrators from both UABC and SDSU.

• Establishing and publishing, early in the process, a schedule that recognized and supported the needs of a diverse group of students who are busy and can not accept changes and additions, was valuable in the recruitment of students.

• Use of the web sites, the servers and the expertise of both University's IT systems was critical to the distribution of course materials and general communication between students and faculty who found themselves in a challenging educational environment.

• Finally, and this can not be emphasized too strongly, in order for an undertaking of this complexity to succeed—or even get underway—it is necessary for the principals to have a fundamental understanding of the complexity and diversity of the border. And, it is this awareness that the program is attempting to convey to the students.

Bibliography: Creating a Joint Graduate Program in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

The Association Liaison Office (ALO), 2003: *The United States and Mexico Partnering to Address Shared Development Goals 1995-2003.* The Association Liaison Office For University Cooperation In Development, Washington, DC.

Botello J., 1998: *The Other Side*. Sunbelt Publications, San Diego.

San Diego State University and Universidad Autonoma de Baja California, 2002: "Master's Degree in Transborder Public Administration and Governance: Promoting Binational Cooperation for Sustainable Development." *Application to the U.S.-Mexico TIES Partnership, U.S. Agency for International Development,* Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias San Diego.

Scott, Allen J. (ed) 2001: *Global City-Regions Trends, Theory, Policy*. Oxford University Press, New York.

Sparrow G. 2001: "San Diego-Tijuana: Not quite a binational city or region." *GeoJournal* **54** (1): 73-83.