

## Article

# International Partnerships in University-Level Music Education: Principles, Pivots, and Possibilities

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**Abstract:** This article reports an analytical review of research and policy concerning the qualities that create, sustain, and enliven academic partnerships between universities in different countries. This review provides context for a discussion of the development of the institutional partnership between the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg (Austria) and Georgia State University (United States of America). A scoping review of the literature suggests that such partnerships are viewed differently by those responsible for the legal agreement establishing the partnership, the faculty and students who are tasked with implementing the partnership, and outsiders who view the results of the partnership via publications, presentations, and performances. This review situates the analysis of the partnership with the identification of themes consistent with the broader literature, including a reflection on cultural awareness, access and equity, institutional and human capacity building, and ethical dilemmas. Implications include a reflection on the collaboration's COVID-19 era development, with the suggestion that the shift to virtual communication enhanced the partnership even as it disrupted the planned implementation.

**Keywords:** international; higher education; music education; partnerships; policy; scoping review

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## 1. Introduction

This article reports an analysis of the development of the institutional partnership between the Universität Mozarteum Salzburg in Austria and Georgia State University in the United States of America. The Mozarteum is a public doctoral institution with an enrollment of 1800 students located in Salzburg, Austria (city population of 157,000). Georgia State is also a public doctoral institution, with an enrollment of 52,000 students located in Atlanta, USA (city population of 497,000).

The partnership's development is situated within a review of research and policy pertaining to international partnerships in higher education. The purposes of this analysis are two-fold. First, the article provides a descriptive report of the partnership between the music education faculties at the two universities. The scoping literature review that grounds this article established that descriptive reports of institutional partnerships are largely absent from the music education literature base. Second, it is hoped that readers may identify strategies and resources that might be assistive when seeking to establish similar partnerships in music or in any other content area within education.

## 2. Background of the Partnership

The Mozarteum–Georgia State partnership can be traced to a research presentation given by the author in Leuven, Belgium, at the 2013 conference of the European Association for Music in Schools. The Head of the Mozarteum's music education program initiated a conversation that resulted in the author's visit to the Mozarteum in 2017. This included the presentation of research at a Mozarteum-hosted academic conference and lectures for Mozarteum's students in music education. The faculty-level partnership grew

from that point forward, culminating in the February 2020 approval of a formal partnership between the two universities.

The Mozarteum/Georgia State relationship is a collaborative venture with origins no more formal than the introductory conversation described in the previous paragraph. As the partnership conversation continued, the administrative leadership at both Universities was consulted to determine institutional interest and feasibility. At the time, the Mozarteum had no partner university in the United States and was eager to identify a collaborating institution. Georgia State University was seeking to continue its growth as a leading research institution by expanding its global reach; the collaboration met both sets of needs. The collaborative agreement centers on the wording of a legal agreement between the two universities. The agreement was developed during the Fall 2018 semester while the author was in residence as a visiting professor at the Mozarteum. The core of the agreement facilitates a one-to-one exchange of students (equal numbers from both institutions) for limited periods of time in support of their progress toward degree completion. Stipulations address issues such as entrance requirements, the language of instruction, the academic calendar, and processes necessary to ensure academic progress. The agreement addresses related topics, including student responsibilities and expenses, visa requirements, insurance, housing, employment, and compliance with the rules and regulations of both the sending and host institutions/countries.

The partnership's institutional agreement does not address the involvement of faculty at either institution. As evident in the following discussion of the related literature, this omission may facilitate the embedding of the partnership within the participating curricular areas, but it may also affect the sustainability of the agreement as faculty, their positions, and their research interests change over time. The following literature distills these issues both broadly—at the institutional level—and specifically—within music and music education programs. This article concludes with a discussion of if and/or how principles of successful and self-sustaining partnerships are evidenced within the Mozarteum–Georgia State relationship.

### 3. Methodological and Conceptual Frameworks

The scoping literature review reported here followed procedures developed by Arskey and O'Malley [1]. Scoping review methods are appropriate for when a broad topic is identified, but key concepts are unknown. Unlike a systematic review, there are few keyword limits, and the types of literature (peer-reviewed, dissertation, etc.) are often not specified a priori [2]. Arskey and O'Malley emphasize the “charting” of key information (p. 26), including synthesis and interpretation, to reveal key issues and themes [3]. These then give eventual rise to the structure of the resulting report.

This review was limited to the 15 years from 2007–2022. The date boundaries were established by two influential reports concerning international activities in higher education. In 2007, Brandenburg and Federkeil contributed to the growing need to measure and evaluate higher education's international work [4]. The authors distinguished between “internationality,” or the current state of an institution's international activities, and “internationalism,” or the process and plan whereby an institution seeks to grow its international work. Brandenburg and Federkeil concluded that many universities report internationalism (which is broad-based at the institution level) when the correct term should often be internationality (based on the work of individual faculty and staff). Brandenburg and Federkeil proposed measures for both concepts. In 2022, González-Bonilla, et al. drew on the earlier report to analyze internationalization in 85 European institutions of higher education [5]. The study noted a contradiction between internationalization as an institutional priority and what faculty and staff do in practice. Where “faculty members are aware—even proud—of the significance of their individual performance and personal engagement ... they often feel overwhelmed by institutions' excessive reliance on their individual voluntarism” (p. 64). The authors concluded that many higher education institutions “maintain internationalization activities by force or habit” (p. 64) rather than by

effective strategic planning, professional rewards for faculty and staff, and recognition of individuals' efforts.

These two reports highlighted that regardless of an institution's intentions of becoming internationalized, any progress toward this goal is driven by the efforts of individual employees. This frequently involves coordination with like-minded faculty and staff colleagues at institutions located around the globe, generated by research goals, shared interests, and friendships. These are the internal, or "inside," factors that determine the external or "outside" measures by which the university is deemed to be more—or less—internationalized. The sections that follow highlight these internal ("inside") and external ("outside") factors. To provide further context, this article continues with an examination of the literature concerning higher education partnerships in music and music education.

#### 4. Music and Music Education in Higher Education's International Partnerships

Topics specifically addressing music within higher education's international partnerships have not been widely explored. A 2021 issue of Arts Education Policy Review offered some of the first research-oriented analyses of the current state of music-focused teacher education policy in international settings, with some authors extending that view toward international partnerships in higher education [6]. As the journal's guest editor wrote, the analysis of these common concerns indicated that "further international collaboration is called for, indeed, required by the awareness of our shared issues ... it has become impossible to ignore what is happening with music teachers worldwide" (p. 3). Indeed, the communication paradigm upended by the COVID-19 pandemic presented opportunities to establish partnerships that moved beyond the typical isolation of music and music education programs to encompass a broad spectrum of music educators at all levels. Professional discourse involving these newly empowered individuals yielded unique philosophical views, diverse pedagogies, and innovative research approaches. As elementary and secondary music teachers came to embrace the virtual opportunities necessitated by COVID-19, so too did faculties and administrators in higher education worldwide. This broadening array of opportunities was designated as an anti-isolationist, pro-music education response to the pandemic [7], resulting in the development of partnerships, a welcoming of formal and informal initiatives, and a strengthening of complementary projects in research, pedagogy, and policy.

Karlsen reported an analysis of interviews with university faculty concerning leadership challenges in the creation and sustenance of international partnerships in music [8]. Some challenges were found to be common, including linguistic and cultural differences, as well as occasionally divergent expectations between partnership participants. Other challenges were those requiring the monitoring of political issues and the implementation of interventions while cautiously maintaining respect for individual university contexts. Though the participants each represented university music departments, the contents of the report were not unique to music settings. Indeed, findings from the study mirrored those of international partnership work in general. Kertz-Welzel's critical analysis of higher education's ambitions of intercultural and international music education similarly concluded that "understanding international encounters as intercultural encounters calls for intercultural understanding and a global mindset" [9] (p. 198). Again, this echoed broad themes in the related literature on international partnerships.

Timonen chronicled one music-focused intercultural project purposed toward this type of mindset [10]. It is unclear whether this Nepalese–Finnish collaboration specifically involved universities from both countries. Of interest is that the project leaders developed strategies for traversing the potential challenges presented when working in intercultural contexts. For instance, participants quickly identified needs for shared statements of values and goals; these later guided the development of curricular materials and reporting documents. Problems that arose became opportunities to consult related research about cultural-political contexts as well as global philosophical perspectives on music education. Obstacles became pivot points for professional growth so that the project leaders could

adjust the goals and continue moving forward through collaborative and individual critical reflexivity.

Faculties in music and music education may accordingly begin consideration of international partnership work through the exploration of similarities and/or dissimilarities in music teacher education policies between two or more countries. One helpful distillation, a discussion of which lies beyond the scope of this article, can be found in Potter's review [11] of the 2017 book *Policy and the Political Life of Music Education* [12]. Another resource is the analysis of worldwide trends and issues in higher music education headed by Minors and Burnard [13]. Writing before the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors pointed specifically toward the partnership opportunities afforded by digital technologies and "[what they offer] to us and to our students, most particularly in terms of democratization, inclusion, and gender" (p. 464).

### 5. Views from Inside Higher Education's International Partnerships

Gatewood and Sutton [14] note that international higher education partnerships "span the full breadth of the academic enterprise—teaching, research, service, and institutional development" (p. 3) and identify goal setting and alignment as paramount to success. Anderson et al. [15] and Umoren et al. [16] both offer that the aims and basic processes of partnerships need to be established early, with contributions from as many stakeholders as possible. In Anderson's project, the agreement charter allowed and encouraged all participants to not only "get the work done" but also to be conscious of how the work was being done. By making explicit the potential problems of international work and the "inter- and intranational institutional barriers to successful collaboration" (p. 4), the agreement enhanced the possibility of a meaningful result from the partnership. As Anderson wrote, "this document obviates the need for one charismatic person to lead the partnership. Participants can refer to 'charter principles' to frame conflicts or create new proposals and help future collaborators understand the considerations for project success" (p. 5). Conversely, a partnership agreement's lack of specificity threatens the long-term sustainability of any collaboration between international higher education entities [17].

In a cost-benefit analysis of several international university partnerships, Burg [18] cautioned that academic units be entrusted with academic work, not with the clerical or financial responsibilities of the partnership. Burg found that successful academic partnerships are embedded within the curriculum that professors teach and that their students experience. Academic partnerships are less successful when they do not become part of the daily pedagogical and research work of professors. If partnerships are to involve students and faculty, Matthews [19] offers five principles for successful practice: (a) foster inclusive partnerships, (b) nurture power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection, (c) accept partnership as a process with uncertain outcomes, (d) engage in ethical partnerships, and (e) enact partnership for transformation (p. 2). Such practices lead to higher productivity and scholarly input among faculty involved in international partnerships [20].

International partnerships in higher education often begin with a single conversation between individuals at a conference or meeting, just as the 2013 conversation in Leuven presaged the Mozarteum–Georgia State relationship [21]. Hamrita [22] examined an international partnership between the University of Georgia and the Tunisian higher education system, highlighting that "the most effective international linkages, regardless of their size, scope, goals, and context, begin with people who put the common good before their own and cut across barriers to pull together whatever it takes to form that bridge" (p. 7). A study of a partnership between West African and U.S. institutions [23] found that the American faculty members were chiefly motivated by pedagogical and student-oriented curricular opportunities. Faculty at the partner university held personal interests and the furtherance of individual research agendas as prominent. Still, the identification of mutual goals is essential to avoiding a partnership that unequally favors one entity over the other, regardless of individual faculty motivations [24].

Aka defined partnerships as strategic alliances or relationships between two or more people or institutions exhibiting qualities of trust, equality, mutual understanding, and obligations [25]. Building on this definition, Kaguhangire-Barifaijo and Namara examined the role of power relations in international academic partnerships and how they affect the qualities of harmony, cohesion, success, and the sustaining of the partnership's relationships [26]. The authors concluded that the lack of clearly written agreements exacerbates problems created by power differentials within higher education's international partnerships. Such power differences can be seen in the political environment of organizing meetings, inequities of resources between the partner universities, the adherence to institutional structures, and the basic academic orientations of the faculty and students as evidenced in an autonomy-control or Master-Servant continuum.

## 6. Views from Outside Higher Education's International Partnerships

Many of the concepts identified within partnerships are echoed in the goals and recommendations of organizations charged with fostering cooperative agreements between institutions of higher education. The evolution of international partnerships in higher education has roots in the post-World War II era's focus on cooperation between nations [27]. A recent analysis examined the oft-stated goal of fostering world peace through the development of such university-level partnerships [28], and another offered that the goal must be to "impact a disruptive future" [29] (p. 23). One policy analyst identifies that a university's expectation of global impact "is now an expectation, not simply a hope or aspiration" [30] (p. 45).

The American Council on Education developed a project to examine the guidance policies and operating standards of higher education's international partnerships in order to identify common themes and make recommendations for practice [31]. The relevant statements of five conglomerate organizations were examined, including the Council of Europe, the Forum on Education Abroad, the International Association of Universities, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, and the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development/UNESCO. Two thematic categories emerged. The first thematic category identified by the content analysis was Program Administration and Management, with subthemes of transparency and accountability, faculty and staff engagement, quality assurance, and strategic planning/role of institutional leadership. These subthemes are consistent with the earlier-noted recommendations regarding the importance of developing and adopting clear guidance documents for partnerships [15,16]. The second thematic category was Cultural and Contextual Issues, with subthemes of cultural awareness, access and equity, institutional and human capacity building, and ethical dilemmas/"negotiated space." These subthemes are supportive of the "within partnership" views mentioned earlier [18,19,26], specifically concerning the issues of scholarship and the navigation of power relations/administrative structures.

The subtheme addressing ethical dilemmas and negotiated space [31] reflects several dangers of international university partnerships. One of these dangers can occur in partnerships where the universities and/or their countries differ substantively in wealth and income levels [23]. Without oversight, these partnerships can generate "parachute research studies" characterized by a power imbalance where the players from one institution take unethical advantage of the other to quickly produce multiple journal articles [32]. A team of 13 journal editors recently offered a set of ethical standards to subvert this practice. The guidelines address multiple issues, including recognition of an editor's "power" to influence equity and justice, the designation of primary and secondary authorship, the documentation of ethical conduct in research, and the dissemination of research via open-access forums [32].

## 7. Findings, Analysis, and Implications

The inquiry for the American Council on Education, reported by Helms [31], revealed two thematic categories of factors contributing to the success of international partnerships in higher education. The first category, Program Administration and Management, appears to be supported by the language in the current agreement between the Mozarteum and Georgia State University, though with limited text addressing the engagement of faculty and staff. The agreement was drafted by Georgia State University personnel, signed by the Dean of the College of the Arts, and subsequently signed by Mozarteum representatives. The document is entirely focused on the functional implementation of the student exchange program, with only a brief introductory sentence alluding to a rationale of improving “the educational experiences and cultural understanding of their students and faculty.” However, neither these purposes nor the faculty is mentioned elsewhere in the agreement. This, then, is not supportive of the second category of factors found necessary for international partnership success, Cultural and Contextual Issues [31]. This factor is aligned with the conclusion of González-Bonilla, et al. (2022), that support for individual faculty members is often secondary to the crafting of institutional goals statements in these types of academic partnerships [5]. This also reflects Brandenburg and Federkeil’s distinction between internationalism at the university’s corporate level and internationality at the faculty level [4].

Yet the vision for an academic partnership between the two universities continues and flourishes. The partnership endures because there is a formal letter of cross-institutional agreement, but not because of any element within the agreement itself. The agreement was finalized during a week in February 2020 when the virus-causing COVID-19 surged throughout Europe and in the days before it became a crisis in the United States. There had been plans for a Mozarteum graduate student to study at Georgia State University in the Fall 2021 semester, but those plans were repeatedly delayed as the pandemic developed. Student exchanges were halted as travel between Andalusia and the United States was banned. A planned May 2021 visit of Mozarteum faculty to the Georgia State University campus was canceled. It seemed as though the partnership would cease activity entirely.

Instead, the reverse occurred. The partnership was reimagined as faculty became newly mobile through virtual conferencing technology. Within months, the Mozarteum music education faculty began developing a series of conversations with their Georgia State University colleagues about how the partnership could be reimagined in a virtual, digital space. Over time, the faculty began to address the cultural and contextual issues missing from the written institutional agreement as a way to move forward with the partnership [31]. This is consistent with Burg’s finding that the personal investment of faculty, beyond any legally required letter of agreement, is a necessary component of successful and sustained academic partnerships [18]. Helms’s review of successful international partnerships identified four cultural and/or contextual elements necessary for sustainability [31]. These four elements were also identified in the analytical process of the scoping review models used for this study [1,3]. The elements are presented below, with examples of how the current Mozarteum/Georgia State partnership is positioned to address them as higher education’s international partnerships continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 7.1. Cultural Awareness

Music education faculty from both institutions visited the other campus in 2018 and 2019. These involved extended residencies, one lasting three months and the other of one month in duration. The residencies included travel to present at conferences and other universities, observations of music education in public school settings, opportunities to become involved in ongoing grant-supported music education university/community collaborations, guest lectures to students and faculty peers, and the development of research

projects that would persist after the visit had concluded. Most important, perhaps, were the opportunities for fellowship and travel; both faculty members visited with friends and family of their host. Conversations became grounded in the day-to-day experiences of living in and teaching music in a new country and in reflection of cultural factors unique to the time and the location. This level of cultural awareness became critically important to understanding the possibilities and problems inherent in the coming shift to virtual and digital interaction as the COVID-19 era descended. A challenge remains, however, as the partnership-related cultural awareness is not yet shared by multiple faculty at either institution. The ongoing success of the partnership will be dependent upon faculty goodwill in the near future. This highlights the need for those organizing such partnerships to be proactive in the formal and informal sharing of information among all colleagues, including those not directly involved in the collaborations.

### *7.2. Access & Equity*

The shift to virtual instruction involved the closing of the physical doors at both universities, but it also opened doors to a broader number of students than envisioned by the authors of the current cross-university agreement letter, away from “a multicultural collection of elite actors,” and toward “a hub for diverse backgrounds and perspectives” [17] (p. 92). The student exchange no longer operates solely as the traditional one-for-one semester-length exchange defined within the agreement [33]. Instead, the involved faculty from both institutions have identified opportunities for student exchange that can occur both formally or informally and represent any duration or level of depth. This is a manifestation of the finding by Bautista, Stanley, and Candusso that the COVID-19 era has strengthened, rather than reduced, the opportunities for collaboration between music education students regardless of geographical or financial constraints [29]. For instance, all interested doctoral students in music education have become involved in virtual partnerships designed to provide support for, extension of, and potential collaborations within their research areas. This level of involvement would likely not have occurred pre-pandemic, as both institutions were rooted in a face-to-face paradigm of doctoral instruction.

### *7.3. Institutional and Human Capacity Building*

International university partnerships require frequent communication, often involving faculty traveling between institutions. The United States was viewed as having restrictive travel and visa policies during the period in which the Mozarteum–Georgia State partnership agreement was developed. Otto wrote, “By injecting complexity, uncertainty, and legal disincentive into the process of traveling to and lawfully remaining in the US, the effectiveness of many types of [higher education institution] international partnerships has been limited” [27] (p. 171). The sequestrations and lockdowns of the COVID-19 era added further to the complexity of the Mozarteum–Georgia State partnership.

The faculties of both the Mozarteum and Georgia State University became more involved, rather than more isolated, as the COVID-19 era has developed. One goal of an institutional partnership may be that faculty can do more in collaboration than they can in isolation [7]. The shift to virtually mediated communication and instruction opened access to the cross-university partnership across the entire university faculties. Georgia State University faculty from the schools of music, art, and FMT (film, media, theater) have worked with the Mozarteum’s School of Music and Arts Education faculty to plan and/or actualize the presentation of workshops, lectures, concerts, and research findings in real-time and in direct collaboration with their colleagues. Examples of activities included the shared presentation of virtual concerts of piano faculty; a research forum between both sets of music education faculty; doctoral student research colloquia; presentations on how to adapt music-focused classes to virtual instruction; percussion master classes; the exploration of appropriate performance practice of vocal literature written by African American composers; an overview of neuroscience and music education; what future elementary music teachers can learn about storytelling; and the role of movement in

the choral rehearsal. In short, both the Mozarteum and Georgia State University were strengthened by the expertise of the partner faculties, with the shift to virtual instruction broadening access to both faculty and students.

#### *7.4. Ethical Dilemmas and “Negotiated Space”*

The Mozarteum–Georgia State University partnership has not yet engendered the types of ethical dilemmas envisioned by Helms [31]. The socioeconomic context of the two universities and their countries are similar. Still, there are potential issues of imbalanced resources (i.e., the funding structures for both institutions are vastly different) or how academic freedom is valued in the other institution or country. Other ethical dilemmas may arise when considering student or faculty roles in shared research or creative activities, the role of funding to support specific faculty-generated partnership projects, or when culturally specific and/or sensitive issues arise during research, artistry, or academic scholarship. In those situations, Helms [31] holds that successful institutional partnerships require a careful negotiation about how such dilemmas will be addressed rather than an exclusive focus on the dilemma itself. The faculty-level negotiations themselves are necessary to fully understand, appreciate, and then move forward from any ethical dilemma encountered in the partnership.

One model for facilitating open conversation among faculty can be seen at 15:00 each Tuesday as the Mozarteum music education faculty gather around a large table to share coffee and baked goods, discuss current academic issues, and share news about coming scholarly events. These meetings have become a time for the music education faculty to join as a situation-based “family” with shared interests, goals, and projects. These moments of goodwill can help guide faculties when they need to negotiate how to address a dilemma, ethical or otherwise. For instance, the topic of partnership-generated publications was the focus at one of these roundtable faculty meetings during the author’s residency. The result was a plan that has guided the development of multiple research and pedagogical projects and publications. Some of these have been co-authored, with the assignment of primary authorship following the plan. Others have been single-authored and represent the views of the individual author and/or institution.

The faculty and students involved in the Mozarteum–Georgia State University partnership would be wise to broadly emulate this model of collaborative decision-making and planning. Etling and McGirr [34] address additional models, guidelines, clarifying questions, and task checklists that may be of interest to individuals beginning to explore partnerships between international higher education institutions.

### **8. The Partnership: Analysis and Implications**

This review has outlined several research-supported principles for the efficient and sustained working of the institutional partnership between the Mozarteum and Georgia State University. Specifically, the partnership highlighted the requisite levels of cultural awareness needed by all participants in the project. While the Mozarteum and Georgia State music programs were similar, both sets of faculty members needed to call on each other as colleagues to assist when identifying COVID-era opportunities for continuing—and even enhancing—the cooperative relationship. Though the formal agreement is between the universities, the informal agreement is much stronger and reaches far more broadly. The informal agreement is an often-unspoken understanding between faculty members that the partnership holds value, is sustainable, and is worthy of time and effort. The informal agreement between the two universities is strong; it is resilient, as demonstrated by the changes occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sustainability of the formal agreement rests entirely on the sustainability of the informal agreement. It is to the credit of both sets of university faculties that the partnership exists and has matured within the very few years of its existence. It is now the responsibility of those faculties to sustain the partnership such that it continues as a permanent feature of music education courses of study in the two institutions.



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