

## The Impact of Evolving Transatlantic Relations on International Partnerships in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impacts of recent, macro-level developments in transatlantic relations on the ability of United States and European Union higher education institutions (HEIs) to leverage international partnerships in achieving their traditional missions of teaching, research, and service. Using literature to place international education within the broader context of transatlantic relations from the post-World War II era to today, the connection between geopolitics and HEI international partnerships is made explicit. Comprehensive internationalization theory is then applied to illustrate the importance of HEI international partnerships in realizing international education outcomes that are congruent with traditional HEI missions. After establishing the link between transatlantic relations, internationalization in higher education, HEI international partnerships and overall HEI performance, recent developments within transatlantic relations are directly analyzed with regards to HEI international partnerships, highlighting impacts on their ability to function. Finding that progressive transatlantic relations result in improved performance outcomes through HEI international partnerships for US and EU HEIs, and that regressive transatlantic relations produce the opposite outcome, the study offers implications for policy makers and HEI administrators.

*Keywords:* higher education, internationalization, international partnerships, international relations, transatlantic relations

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an increasing number of incidents and movements have begun to substantially reshape transatlantic relations, particularly referring to the multifaceted western-world alliance between the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) (Kunz, 2020; Lagadec, 2012). These developments include political and economic isolationism at the national and supranational levels, as well as a rise in nationalism and populism among the citizenry itself throughout the US and EU (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). The United Kingdom's (UK) decision to leave the EU (Hobolt, 2016), US trade conflicts with the EU (and

various individual EU member nations) (Amiti, Redding, & Weinstein, 2019), travel/visa restrictions and differing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic serve as policy manifestations of this larger shift.

This changing context, moving away from the post-World War II (WWII) era in transatlantic relations of cooperation and toward increased individualism and competition, bears wide-ranging implications for the higher education sector, particularly related to several key functions and outcomes of higher education institution (HEI) international partnerships (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Altbach & de Wit, 2017; de Wit, 2002). As international partnerships play a foundational role in the ability of HEIs to leverage comprehensive internationalization in achieving their strategic missions of teaching, research, and service, the impacts of these changes in transatlantic relations are deserving of immediate attention (Hudzik, 2015; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). The aforementioned relational evolution across the Atlantic not only affects the international partnerships between EU and US HEIs, government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations, but also the partnerships between US and EU HEIs and entities in other regions of the world (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; de Wit, 2002). Areas of HEI international partnerships that are directly impacted by these developments in transatlantic relations include, but are not limited to, faculty and student exchange agreements, research partnerships and funding contracts, sponsored student international enrollment agreements, international branch campuses (IBCs), and dual/joint degree programs (Hudzik, 2011). If these international partnerships of US and EU HEIs are negatively impacted through the current state of transatlantic relations, the argument can then be made that recent developments in this international diplomatic area may hinder US and EU HEIs' ability to achieve their foundational missions.

By proceeding in the following manner, this paper contributes to the existing literature by using international higher education theory and comprehensive internationalization theory to link transatlantic relations with overall university performance, while also testing that link through practical observations of case examples. First, the ties between transatlantic relations and higher education are made explicit, and the link to HEI international partnerships is identified. Second, international education is defined, and its connection to overall university performance is detailed. Third, comprehensive internationalization theory is outlined with a focus toward HEI international partnerships in various functional areas of international education and the achievement of HEI missions. Fourth, the current state of transatlantic relations is reviewed, and its effects on the ability of HEIs to implement and maintain international partnerships are analyzed. Fifth, the findings and implications of the theoretical and analytical aspects of the paper are summarized and discussed. Lastly, the paper concludes with a description of the limitations of the study and potential avenues for future research.

## **LITERATURE AND THEORY**

### **Transatlantic Relations, International Higher Education, and HEI International Partnerships**

The period following the conclusion of World War II, extending until recent years, saw a rapid expansion of the transatlantic relationship between the western democracies that remained, or were created, in the wake of the peace negotiations amongst the warring nations (Kaplan, 2004; Lagadec, 2012). US industrial systems, infrastructure, and lands were relatively unscathed since nearly all combat occurred outside of their borders, and the Americans had also experienced a lower amount of casualties due to joining the Allied effort well after the beginning of the conflict in Europe. Therefore, the US was uniquely positioned to embark on an aggressive foreign aid campaign that combined education, economics, and diplomacy (Hogan, 1987; Lagadec, 2012). Through the European Recovery Program, commonly known as the "Marshall Plan" (named after then US Secretary of State George Marshall), the United States propelled

itself from the pre-war era, which favored isolationism, into an expansive effort to support its allies across the Atlantic in their rebuilding plans, providing funding for a vast array of public-facing projects. These undertakings included constructing new roads and buildings, enhancing international trade and investing heavily in public research and higher education, largely through international exchange and cooperation among HEIs (de Wit, 2002; Hogan, 1987).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) served to interlock the western democracies on both sides of the Atlantic along security lines, entering them into a collective defense agreement so as to deter potential post-war aggressions from growing and strengthening military and economic powers, namely the Soviet Union (Kaplan, 2004). Whereas the United States had previously been wary of becoming involved in European conflicts (both World Wars provide examples), the advent of NATO ensured that there would be a quick military response from the US government should one of its European allies come under attack. In combination, the implementation of the Marshall Plan and the signing of the treaty establishing NATO spawned a new age of transatlantic relations (Kaplan, 2004; Lagadec, 2012); one where the future of the western powers on both sides of the ocean were intricately woven together through a complex integration of economics, diplomacy, and security, which were heavily supported by cooperation efforts in higher education (de Wit, 2002; Hogan, 1987; Vestal, 1994).

The platform for integration and expansion in the transatlantic relationship, established by post-war measures such as those above, as well as a broad range of international trade and financing developments (e.g., World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), etc.) (Irwin, 1995; Lagadec, 2012), allowed for activities in many sectors to prosper and flourish – in programmatic scope as well as in the resulting economic and educational benefits for the array of stakeholders involved in such activities (de Wit, 2002; Hogan, 1987). It is thusly not a surprise that the expanded nature of the post-war economic transatlantic relationship led to extensive international development in the education sector, particularly at the post-secondary level through the proliferation of HEI international partnerships (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004).

The Fulbright Program and Erasmus+ are two examples of programs at the national/supranational level that emerged through this period of expanded cooperation and were used to leverage the connection between transatlantic relations and HEI international partnerships. Emerging as a key piece of US educational and cultural diplomacy in 1946, between the end of WW2 and the full realization of the Cold War, the Fulbright Program (named after the Arkansas senator that originally proposed it) has provided funding and support for exchange between the US and countries throughout Europe and the rest of the world through partnering HEIs. The underlying goal of the Fulbright Program is to use the internationalization of education to nurture and sustain cooperation between partnering countries (Bettie, 2015; Lebovic, 2013). While primarily serving to fostering deeper cohesion and sense of collective identity throughout Europe, the EU's educational and cultural exchange program, Erasmus+ (originally named "Erasmus" at its 1987 founding), also provides exchange pathways and funding opportunities for students, scholars, and professionals in partner countries throughout the world, in addition to within the EU (European Commission, 2020). Both initiatives, while implemented from a macro perspective, are byproducts of progressive transatlantic relations which enable institutional level international partnerships between HEIs from both program countries and partner countries on both sides of the Atlantic and throughout the world.

The internationalization of higher education (to be defined extensively in the following section) contains numerous activities and elements that have vast socioeconomic ramifications, not just for countries directly involved within the transatlantic discussion, but globally as well (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Vestal, 1994). From the movement of students and faculty members, to workforce development, to increased research and development (R&D), to improved international relations, to increased language learning/proficiency and many matters both beyond and in between, the activities created, maintained, and expanded through the internationalization of education (largely enabled by HEI international partnerships) has provided the seed for a vast throng of participants and beneficiaries (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2002; Knight, 2004; Vestal, 1994).

### **Internationalization of Education and University Performance**

Having established the relationship between transatlantic relations and the internationalization of education, it is now necessary to properly define what the internationalization of education means and how it is connected to overall university performance. Due to developments over time in the scientific study of internationalization in the higher education sphere, the definition of the term “international education” has shifted and adapted to accommodate more complexity, but its foundation is based on an understanding of internationalization in higher education as a part of the response to globalization more broadly (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Prominent international education scholar Jane Knight established the precise definition that is commonly accepted within the field today (de Wit, 2020): “Internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). Framed this way, the internationalization of higher education can be understood as an effort that is ongoing and develops over time across a broad swath of dimensions; further, internationalization is intentionally injected throughout core strategies and activities in every facet of higher education (Knight, 2004). While the rationales for pursuing internationalization cover a broad span of categories, including social, political, economic, and academic motivations (Knight, 2004), they can also collectively be viewed as positively contributing to overall HEI performance (de Wit, 1995, 2000). The established literature on HEI performance has concluded that HEIs around the world strive to achieve three overall missions which comprise their organizational performance: teaching, research, and service to society (Agasisti & Pohl, 2012; de Wit, 1995; Hudzik, 2011; Lehmann, Meoli, Paleari, & Stockinger, 2017). Though HEI’s differentiate in terms of the focus and distribution of effort put toward these missions depending on their self-categorization into various classifications (e.g., research-intensive HEIs, teaching-focused HEIs, community colleges, etc.) (Jungblut & Jungblut, 2017), these three broad missions are widely recognized. So while the motives and activities encompassing the internationalization of higher education come from a wide variety of stakeholders, from an institutional perspective, internationalization is intended to improve the education of students, the production of knowledge, and an institution’s contribution to societal service by ensuring that the university is strategically aligned to incorporate an international, intercultural, and global dimension into every function (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2000; Knight, 2004). Research incentivizes this organizational behavior by producing evidence that internationalization in higher education produces positive outcomes in teaching (increased student knowledge, openness, independence, analytical/critical thinking, cultural competence, leadership skills, etc.), research (improvement in ranking/recognition/reputation, citation index frequency, international publications, etc.) and service to society (positive public health metrics, local economic development, environmental sustainability, etc.)

(Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). This directly links an HEI's pursuit of internationalization to its ability to improve its performance of its three core missions.

### **Comprehensive Internationalization and HEI International Partnerships**

With the connection between transatlantic relations and the internationalization of higher education explained, and the question of why HEIs pursue internationalization answered, the specifics of how HEIs achieve internationalization must be addressed. Comprehensive internationalization theory, originally posited by scholar John Hudzik, bridges the conceptual gap between internationalization as a strategy that improves overall HEI performance and how that strategy is implemented to achieve institutional outcomes and goals (Hudzik, 2011, 2015; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012). Hudzik (2011) provides a thorough definition of comprehensive internationalization which highlights its institutional foundations, its operational orientation and its urgency:

“Comprehensive internationalization is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility (Hudzik, 2011, p. 6).”

Hudzik introduces depth by explaining how comprehensive internationalization, through its complete internal organizational alignment from top to bottom (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012), also affects every external action and effort of the HEI, including a focus on international partnerships and relations within global networks (Hudzik, 2011, 2015).

The implementation of comprehensive internationalization requires an HEI to internally accumulate support from every level and area of the institution, and its portfolio of stakeholders, to commit to actions that increase student mobility (incoming and outgoing), expand language learning, develop international internship opportunities, participate in international research, integrate international dimensions into the curriculum and translate its global efforts into benefits for local communities (Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012). Functional outcomes of comprehensive internationalization implementations through HEI international partnerships include faculty professional development, student/faculty diversity, developments in curriculum delivery/design, improvement in institutional competitiveness and ranking systems and improved research, among others (Hudzik, 2011). Because external relationships are necessary for the existence of the activities which produce such outcomes, formal HEI international partnerships are critical to the success of comprehensive internationalization efforts (Sandström & Weimer, 2016).

Specific types of HEI international partnerships that enable the realization of comprehensive internationalization goals include staff and student exchange agreements, international internship and service learning programs, collaborative degrees, joint research agreements, curriculum development partnerships, capacity building initiatives and online/virtual collaboration, amid many others (Hoseth & Thampapillai, 2018; Sandström & Weimer, 2016). The literature shows that these HEI international partnerships supply the programmatic pathway for institutions to reap the positive outcomes of internationalization for their students, staff and stakeholder populations, which improve an HEI's ability to achieve their three core missions (European Association for International Education, 2015; Hoseth & Thampapillai, 2018; Sandström & Weimer, 2016). To illustrate: student exchange agreements enable

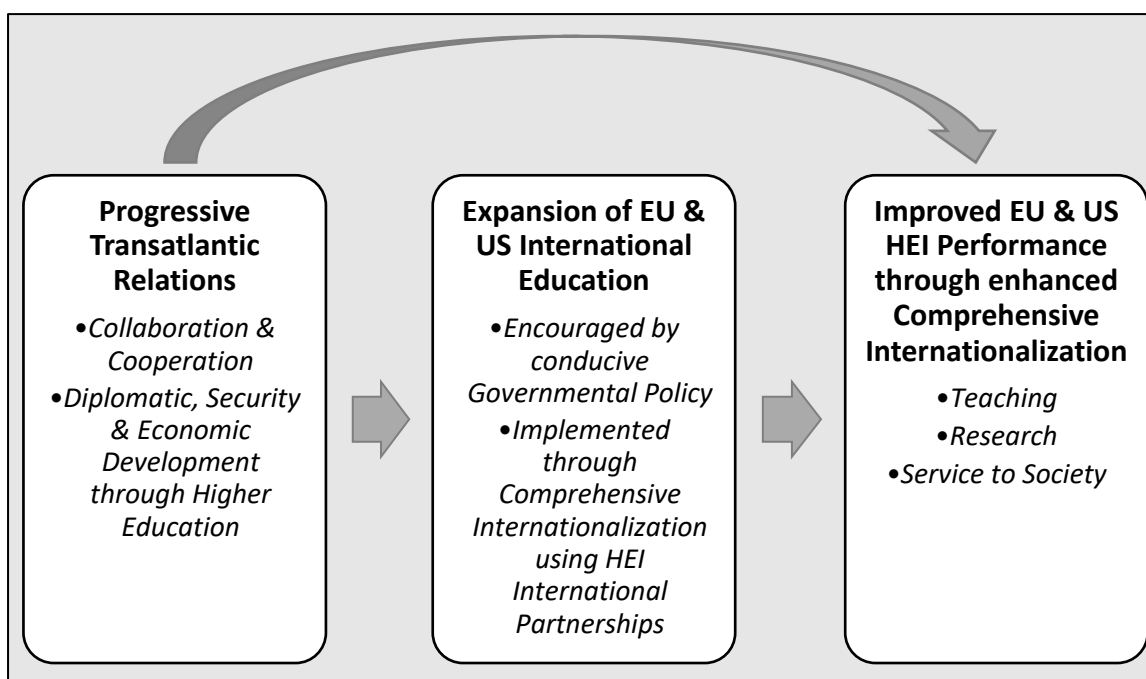
students to build cultural competency through studying abroad, improving outcomes of the teaching mission. Joint research initiatives enable scholars to develop internationally recognized studies and apply for international funding, improving outcomes of the research mission. HEI partnerships centered on providing educational and economic development services within the host societies where they are nested improve outcomes of the service mission (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Hudzik, 2015). Thus, strategy implementation with an eye toward comprehensive internationalization is necessary for an HEI to best achieve its three core missions, and HEI international partnerships play a critical role for such thorough comprehensive internationalization to take place (Hudzik, 2011; Sandström & Weimer, 2016).

### **CURRENT EVENTS IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS AND IMPACT ON HEI INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

The completed review of the corresponding literature and theory shows that the prevailing cooperation and expansion within transatlantic relations following the end of WWII created a stable environment for the proliferation of international education in the US and EU through the furthered implementation of HEI international partnerships (Bettie, 2015; de Wit, 2002; European Commission, 2020; Lebovic, 2013; Vestal, 1994). Further, comprehensive internationalization theory explains how HEI international partnerships provide HEIs with the tools necessary to achieve international education outcomes which improve HEIs' performance in their primary missions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Hoseth & Thampapillai, 2018; Hudzik, 2011, 2015; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; Sandström & Weimer, 2016). Therefore, a positive qualitative correlation is observed between cooperative and collaborative (progressive) transatlantic relations and the performance of HEIs in the US and EU (see Figure 1, below).

**Figure 1**

*Progressive Transatlantic Relations And Improved EU & US HEI Performance*



Source: author depiction

This then begs the question - does a retrenchment in transatlantic relations reduce the ability of HEIs to leverage comprehensive internationalization through international partnerships in order to better perform their three core missions? In the midst of a reshuffling of transatlantic relations and a redefining of traditional transatlantic relationships, this question is particularly pertinent for HEIs in the US and EU, as well as their numerous stakeholders. As opposed to the prior era of cooperation, integration, and collaboration (progressive transatlantic relations), recent times have shifted towards isolation, individualism, and increased competition (regressive transatlantic relations) (Amiti, Redding, & Weinstein, 2019; Hobolt, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Kunz, 2020; Lagadec, 2012). To investigate the impact of evolving transatlantic relations on the ability of HEIs to implement international partnerships, and therefore improve university performance, a small selection of specific developments in transatlantic relations and their implications for HEI international partnerships are detailed in what follows. These developments include: 1) the UK's departure from the EU, 2) restrictive travel and visa policies imposed by the US, and 3) differing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the US and EU. While rooted and connected philosophically and theoretically to a rise in nationalism and authoritarian populism on both sides of the Atlantic, these examples of the larger trend have very practical impacts and real consequences for HEI international partnerships (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; Laws & Ammigan, 2020; Peters, 2020).

### **The UK's Departure from the EU**

Brexit, or the formal departure of the UK from the EU, required several years, many negotiations, and multiple transitions within the office of the UK Prime Minister. An official process that began with a referendum vote in 2016 was finally executed at the turn of the year between 2020 and 2021, leaving most implementation of the exit to take place in 2021 and beyond (Hobolt, 2016; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Marginson, 2017). As membership in the EU requires a deep level of European integration along economic, diplomatic, educational, and social dimensions, among others, Brexit necessitates that the UK take a more individual and isolated approach in restructuring its external relationships with the EU, the US, and the rest of the world (Hobolt, 2016; Kunz, 2020; Mayhew, 2017). While political opinions and perspectives pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of that decision are contentious, there remain practical realities that cannot be refuted, such as the renegotiation of trade deals/partnerships, the joining/maintaining of security/border alliances, and the recalibration/realignment of HEI internationalization, all of which were previously intertwined within broader EU policy (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; de Wit, 2002; European Commission, 2021; Lagadec, 2012; Marginson, 2017).

The consequences of the UK leaving the EU, while being regressive in terms of transatlantic relations, also negatively impacts the implementation of HEI partnerships in the UK, throughout the EU, and in the US as well (European Commission, 2020; Marginson, 2017; Mayhew, 2017). New restrictions of movement between the UK and the EU complicates all HEI international partnerships that require the mobility of students and staff (academic and administrative) (Hobolt, 2016; Marginson, 2017). Additionally, since the UK has left the EU, UK HEIs are now excluded from the valuable Erasmus+ program; meaning, HEIs from the UK can no longer apply for new HEI partnerships or funding through Erasmus+, nor can they apply for renewals or extensions of Erasmus+ programs and funding that they currently receive based on prior membership (European Commission, 2021). Not only does this inhibit the ability of UK HEIs to engage with EU HEIs in international partnerships, such as student/staff exchange agreements and joint research funding initiatives, but it also restricts access to partnerships with certain US HEIs due to the US participation in the Erasmus+ network as a partner country (European Commission,

2020; 2021; Marginson, 2017; Mayhew, 2017). Consequently, upon exiting the EU, the UK instantly loses the ability to use Erasmus+ programming and funding to operate hundreds of partnerships that annually involve millions upon millions of Euros and the inward/outward mobility of tens of thousands of students and thousands of faculty members, most of which are within the EU, but also includes a small subset of funding and student/staff mobility with US partner HEIs (European Commission, 2020). The scale of activity engendered by Erasmus+ makes it inherently difficult for the UK to pivot towards other opportunities and markets to make up for the loss of access to the existing network, and at a minimum would require a significant investment of resources to pursue such a recalibration (European Commission, 2021; Mayhew, 2017). Thus, Brexit constitutes a hurdle in the ability of HEIs in the UK, EU, and US to partner with one another to pursue positive institutional outcomes in teaching, research, and service.

### **Restrictive Travel and Visa Policies Imposed by the US**

Following the 2016 US presidential election, the administration of President Donald Trump, who rode the rising popularity of nationalism and conservative populism to the top of the US executive branch, began pursuing a regressive transatlantic (and global) policy platform focused on revamping US foreign relations strategy to a more isolated and individualistic agenda (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; Laws & Ammigan, 2020; Peters, 2020; Pierce, 2019). A key facet of this policy agenda was to adjust foreign policy in a way as to protect US economic interests from foreign competition. The resulting trade wars between the US and China, and the US and EU are key tenets of this policy program, but more restrictive US travel and visa policies also served this strategy (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; Pierce, 2019). The later has borne consequences for US HEIs engaging in international partnerships with their EU counterparts.

Travel and visa restrictions issued by the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) create difficulties for US and EU HEIs that are seeking to partner with one another in any way that requires physical movement (Peters, 2020). By injecting complexity, uncertainty, and legal disincentive into the process of travelling to and lawfully remaining in the US, the effectiveness of many types of HEI international partnerships has been limited. As demonstrated earlier in this work, these mobility-based international partnerships, including international branch campuses (IBCs), student and staff exchange agreements, experiential learning/international internship programs, and collaborative degree programs, among many others, produce positive outcomes in each of the three HEI mission areas (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Hoseth & Thampapillai, 2018; Hudzik, 2011; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Sandström & Weimer, 2016). Through the implementation of immigration policies which make mobility inherently more difficult, the ability of US HEIs to engage with their EU counterparts through formal partnerships is significantly hampered (Altbach & de Wit, 2017; Laws & Ammigan, 2020; Peters, 2020). These hindrances contributed to a lull in incoming international researchers to the US, slowing growth during the pre-COVID Trump administration to an average annual rate of 0.6 percent, whereas the previous four years saw average growth of 3.5 percent (Institute of International Education, 2020). This impact on partnerships, in combination with the role that these restrictive and ever-changing immigration policies play in the overall decline in the ability of US HEIs to recruit and retain international students (and their talent and tuition fees), not only bears negative implications for HEI institutional performance, but also for the financial stability of the US higher education sector as a whole (Peters, 2020; Pierce, 2019). This is made evident through the international student enrollment growth rate, which dipped from an average annual rate of 8.1 percent from 2012-2016 all the way to 1.65 percent in the period from President Trump's inauguration until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Institute of International Education, 2020).

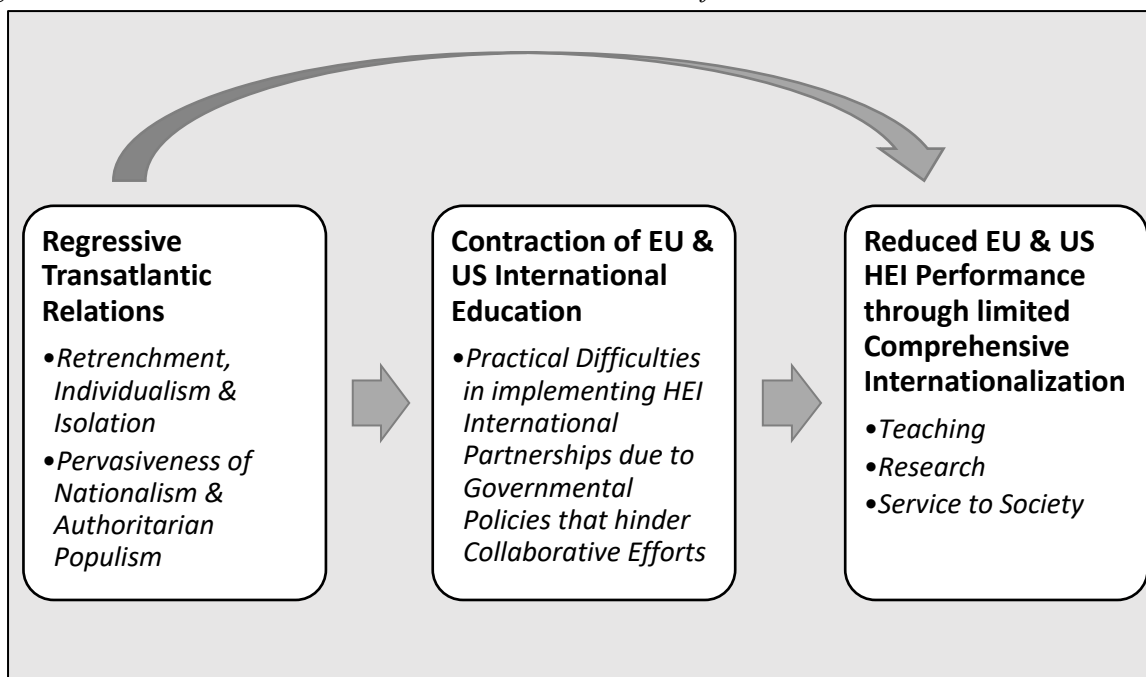


### **Differing Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the US and EU**

The COVID-19 pandemic has permeated nearly every aspect of life, including acute effects on transatlantic relations, and subsequently HEI internationalization and international partnership efforts (Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2020a; 2020b; Rumbley, 2020). While certain aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic contain elements outside of governmental control, the lack of comprehensive transatlantic cooperation and coordination in the response to the pandemic, including public restrictions/measures, research efforts and vaccine rollout, are a result of regressive transatlantic relations policy choices (Basrur & Kliem, 2021; Linka, Peirlinck, Costabal, & Kuhl, 2020; Seyfi, Hall, & Shabani, 2020). When considered alongside other developments in transatlantic relations that serve to inhibit the ability of individuals to freely move, the competitive and individualistic aspects of the transatlantic response to the pandemic intensify the negative consequences of COVID-19 and pile onto a strained HEI international partnership climate by exponentially increasing the level of operational and financial uncertainty in student and staff mobility (Rumbley, 2020; Seyfi, Hall, & Shabani, 2020). Not only does this exacerbate the limitations to HEI partnerships, as similarly discussed in the two previous examples of developments in transatlantic relations, but the regressive transatlantic response to the pandemic also contributes to the current financial crises of transatlantic HEIs as a result of pandemic related operational losses, which threatens the ability to provide funding for HEI international partnerships in the future (Basrur & Kliem, 2021; Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020; NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2020a; 2020b). This has also produced negative outcomes in the short-term, with the cancellation of a multitude of conferences and workshops sponsored by various associations and research interest groups which enable transatlantic networking and partnership growth (Blanco & de Wit, 2020).

### **FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The primary findings of this study are produced through a thorough application of literature and theory surrounding the history of transatlantic relations and the development of international education in the US and EU, as well as the benefits of comprehensive internationalization for the overall ability of HEIs to achieve their core missions. This investigation results in the conclusion that progressive transatlantic relations and the improved performance of HEIs, through the implementation of HEI international partnerships, are correlated (see Figure 1, above). To test whether the inverse is true (if regressive transatlantic relations and the reduced performance of HEIs, through the hindrance of HEI international partnerships, are correlated) (see Figure 2, below), a small sample of regressive cases in recent transatlantic relations developments was analyzed to observe impacts on the ability of HEIs to partner with one another in the transatlantic context. Research and prior literature on the UK's departure from the EU, travel and visa restrictions imposed by the US, and differing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in the US and EU evidences negative impacts on HEI international partnerships in the US and EU. Therefore, it is concluded that the correlation between transatlantic relations and HEI performance, through the ability to implement HEI international partnerships, functions in both directions.

**Figure 2***Regressive Transatlantic Relations And Reduced EU & US Performance**Source:* author depiction

These findings bear myriad implications for policy makers, HEI administrators, and other HEI stakeholders. While a connection between transatlantic relations and international education has long been observed and documented (de Wit, 2002; Hogan, 1987; Knight, 2004; Vestal, 1994), this study contributes to the field by applying comprehensive internationalization theory to specifically show how evolving transatlantic relations impact the performance of HEIs through the ability to implement HEI international partnerships. With knowledge of this correlation and the theoretical evidence behind it, policymakers interested in improving HEI performance can better advocate for progressive transatlantic relations in order to provide a more conducive environment for the HEI international partnerships which produce positive outcomes in each HEI mission area. Additionally, policy makers that are primarily interested in pursuing progressive transatlantic relations policy agendas have an additional beneficial byproduct to espouse in their argumentation. For HEI administrators, this study also provides a platform for public policy advocacy for progressive transatlantic relations, as well as in requests/applications for supplemental funding for HEI international partnership development to make up for any outcome shortfalls that may result from regressive transatlantic relations. With limited control over the nature of governmental transatlantic policies, this study may also spur HEI administrators to innovate in the area of international partnerships, utilizing technology and creativity (such as virtual mobility) to help stem the losses incurred by regressive developments in transatlantic relations (Marinoni, van't Land, & Jensen, 2020).

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study has found that progressive transatlantic relations encourage improved performance outcomes through HEI international partnerships for HEIs in the US and EU, and that regressive transatlantic relations produce the opposite outcome. The historical and theoretical ties between transatlantic relations and higher education have been detailed and the link to HEI international partnerships evidenced. International education and its rationales/benefits have been thoroughly defined and its

connection to overall university performance explicated. Comprehensive internationalization theory has been outlined with a focus toward HEI international partnerships in various operational outcomes of international education and the achievement of HEI missions. Current developments in transatlantic relations were reviewed and their resulting effects upon the ability of HEIs to implement international partnerships were analyzed. Lastly, the findings and implications of the theoretical and analytical aspects of the paper have been laid out, providing beneficial information for policy makers and HEI administrators to use as they formulate strategy moving forward.

While this study produces useful discussion, analysis, and findings, it must also be understood and used within the context of its limitations, which also provide avenues for future research. This paper focuses on developments within transatlantic relations, but future studies on the interplay of international relations in other world regions might also provide insights into HEI international partnership trends and associated outcomes for HEI mission performance. The present work also centers on recent developments from 2016 to today, while future research could take a more holistic, post-pandemic/post-Brexit/post-Trump administration look at the longer-term impacts on HEI international partnerships and their benefits. Should the near socioeconomic/political future produce a return to progressive transatlantic relations, this would provide another chance to test the findings of this study.

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