



# ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

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# Illinois Launches Transnational Partnership Alliance with Leading Universities in Stockholm, Sweden

BY HARRY DANKOWICZ AND ANNA STENPORT

## To Boldly Go

With *INSPIRE: The Illinois-Sweden Program for Educational and Research Exchange* ([www.inspire.illinois.edu](http://www.inspire.illinois.edu)), the University of Illinois is launching an unprecedented effort toward a comprehensive partnership with a peer group of top-ranked foreign institutions. Together with KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH, [www.kth.se](http://www.kth.se)) in Stockholm, Sweden, Illinois has committed resources toward establishing a transnational partnership and for pursuing the near-term inclusion of two other leading universities in Stockholm, namely, Stockholm University (SU, [www.su.se](http://www.su.se)) and Karolinska Institutet (KI, [www.ki.se](http://www.ki.se)). This partnership alliance is envisioned as a collaborative venture of well-matched, peer institutions and is expected to be fully reciprocal.

The alliance builds on a recently initiated strategic partnership between Illinois and KTH and an ongoing effort to coordinate research and educational activities between KTH, SU, and KI, for example through Stockholm Science City, the Science for Life Laboratory, and Stockholm Academic Forum. Together, these top Swedish universities include faculties of engineering, humanities, law, medicine, natural sciences, and social sciences. With a total enrollment of more than 70,000

Officials from KTH and the University of Illinois come together during a May symposium in Stockholm.



Courtesy, KTH Stockholm

undergraduate and graduate students and close to 14,000 faculty and staff, KTH, SU, and KI account for a substantial portion of research and educational activities in Sweden, as reflected in comprehensive rankings and research grant allocations.

The INSPIRE alliance facilitates our engagement with one of the world's strongest economic regions—Sweden, Scandinavia, and the European Union—with a stable and recognized education and research culture and strong support from public and private sources. The alliance reflects the central civic and economic contributions of the partner institutions to the state of Illinois, the United States, Sweden, and the European Union and provides a model for global leadership in higher education, research collaboration, and civic engagement. At Illinois, the alliance serves as the pilot project and flagship program of the new “Illinois Strategic International Partnerships” initiative (see sidebar), a coordinated approach to, and long-term planning for, international engagement.

## 20% Inspiration...

The strategic alliance arose from two collaborative research symposia with KTH, in December 2010 on the Urbana campus and in May 2011 on the KTH campus, bringing together around 200 faculty, students, and administrators, including meetings with leadership and international program coordinators at SU and KI. These two research symposia helped to bridge cross-institutional barriers





Courtesy, KTH Stockholm

and allow faculty and administrators to become familiar and comfortable with the respective institutional cultures and educational systems. The symposia also highlighted an extensive network of existing and ongoing research collaboration between groups at Illinois and at the alliance institutions.

A core feature of the strategic research symposia was the comprehensive engagement across multiple colleges, schools, and faculties, including engineering, natural and social sciences, arts, and the humanities, targeted at engaging faculty, as well as both graduate and undergraduate students at the partner institutions. At the second research symposium, discussions were organized around 11 thematic research and educational areas: System Engineering and Control; Electric Power Engineering; Transport Engineering and Infrastructure; Architecture and Urban Planning; Media Studies,

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## Bringing “Intentionality” to our International Engagement

The Illinois Strategic International Partnerships (ISIP) initiative represents a new approach to international engagement and collaboration at the campus level. “Traditionally, we have relied almost exclusively on a highly de-centralized, ‘ground-up’ approach to identify and engage with partner institutions around the world,” notes Tim Barnes, assistant director for institutional collaboration, who first proposed ISIP, and has recently been named director of the initiative. Largely driven by individual faculty members and study abroad administrators, the campus’s institutional partnerships have tended to be highly focused on a specific collaborative research project or cooperative education program. The end result is a large number of partnerships with somewhat limited institu-

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tional impact, which rarely move beyond the faculty or academic units that initiated them. By its very nature, this model all but precludes any sort of long-range, strategic planning for international engagement at the institutional level.

The ISIP is simple, but ambitious. It seeks to advance the global standing of the University of Illinois as a preeminent public research university, by creating a truly “transnational” institution, where innovative knowledge, research, education, faculty, and students move freely across borders of all kinds—whether geopolitical, cultural, disciplinary, or academic. ISIP will do this by leveraging existing relationships and cultivating new relationships with a small, highly select group of true peer institutions around the world to form partnerships that are both broadly and deeply impactful—collaborating with departments, colleges, centers and institutes to inform and enhance all of our core mission activities: research, education, public service, and economic development.

“I would characterize our traditional approach to international engagement as ‘*incidental*,’ since the partnerships arise somewhat haphazardly, based on whomever among our faculty is on hand and interested at any given time,” Barnes added, “the ISIP initiative is an effort, at the campus level, to be more *intentional* in our international engagement.”

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Communications Research and the History of Technology; Nuclear, Plasma, and Radiological Engineering; Smart Cities; Chemical and Biomolecular Sciences; Speech and Language Technology; Information and Communication Technology; and Entrepreneurship and Technology Transfer.

These discussions resulted in an extensive list of collaborative initiatives, including reciprocal student and faculty exchange programs, shared course development, research collaboration, innovative cross-institutional research centers and university/industry partnerships, recurrent collaborative research workshops, and long-term funding sources for self-sustained

research partnerships. Notable examples of collaborative education include two shared and co-taught Illinois-KTH class-lab-field courses on *Arctic Environmental Change and History* and *Coral Reef Ecosystems and the History of Scandinavian Colonialism* (on location in the Arctic and the Caribbean); participation of KTH students in an Illinois-based web course on organic chemistry; joint lecture series

on Smart cities and Cloud computing and a joint student competition on Innovation for Smart Cities; and technology entrepreneurship student projects aiming to identify U.S. customers for Swedish technologies and vice versa.

Several collaborative research proposals in subjects ranging from chemical engineering, microbiology, and computational fluid mechanics, to language science, arose from the symposia. Significant synergies and opportunities for leveraging complementary strengths were found in the areas of transportation, in high-performance computational biology, in mobile wireless security, in media and communication studies, architecture and urban planning,

and linguistics-related fields. As an immediate consequence of the meeting, the Illinois Rail Transportation and Engineering Center became formally affiliated with the KTH Railway Group.

### ...and 80% Accountability

The INSPIRE partnership alliance rests on the three foundational pillars of education, research, and service. It measures its success in terms of its impact on its stakeholders: the students and faculty at each institution, as well as the state, commercial, and civic societies of Illinois and Sweden.

As envisioned by the INSPIRE leadership, the alliances is achieved when the partnering universities are seen to serve an essential role in the exchange of knowledge and expertise between the host countries and regions; are able to enhance their respective access to the world community of higher education and research with initial emphasis on Europe and North America; and are able to project jointly their excellence and reputation in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and innovation in international networks involving the alliance with external partners, for example in Singapore and China.

These core outcomes distinguish the proposed alliance from a partnership based solely on traditional elements of educational exchange and collaborative research. They elevate the alliance to a strategic undertaking that adds to the synergies and economies of scale of a partnership by emphasizing the institutional role and responsibilities. These outcomes also suggest broadening the metrics of success beyond traditional measures of student, faculty, and research exchange and collaboration, to include enhanced contributions to civic and commercial engagements between the State of Illinois and Sweden; public engagement and diplomacy; involvement in policy-making organizations; connections to funding agencies; enhanced recruitment possibilities; access to research facilities; international awareness of the alliance brand; and growth of additional bilateral arrangements with external partners.



Cerberus guarding the entrance to the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm.