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Five (More) Reasons why Diversity and International Offices Must Collaborate

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INTRODUCTION

This brief provides an overview and rationales for the collaboration of Equity and Diversity and Internationalization offices in higher education institutions. Building on the momentum of AIEA’s October 5, 2014 webinar focusing on the same topic, this brief seeks to explore and expand upon themes discussed by Dr. Harvey Charles and Dr. Benjamin Reese. “Five (more) reasons” is intended to keep the conversation alive in our field and to offer suggestions to SIOs for collaborations with the equity and diversity offices on their campuses. The numerical presentation is simply for organization. Any point may be more important than another to an individual institution.

FIVE (MORE) REASONS

1. A “Global Gap” Exists for Students of Color

Recent data indicates that in the United States, white students disproportionately represent the population of students who study abroad (Institute on International Education, 2013). Although researchers have demonstrated the developmental, educational, and career benefits associated with study abroad, the decision-making rationales and programmatic choices of white and non-white students related to study abroad appear to differ (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). If the goals of a global experience are deemed to be crucial for the academic, development, and career goals of all students, such goals should also be accessible to all students. As a whole, equity and diversity offices may be more attuned to the educational goals, aspirations, and barriers of students who are minoritized (see Sassen, 2004) in the academy. Regular consultation with diversity offices may help international offices to increase their recruitment efforts to satisfy the learning needs of multiple stakeholders in the areas of program foci, funding schemes, desired learning outcomes, and timing of programs.

2. Generation 0, 1, and 1.5 may be Indistinguishable to Instructors

A recent study conducted at the University of Minnesota (Woodruff, Kappler, Johnstone, & Yefanova, 2014) found that instructors often did not know whether students were international, immigrant, or non-immigrant students in their classes, even though such data is available to instructors. The contributions of students who are international students (Generation “0”), new immigrants or Green Card holders (Generation 1), or children of immigrants (Generation 1.5) may dramatically impact how they contribute in classrooms or their learning styles. International and diversity offices can coordinate to help distinguish general learning differences in these populations, but also to identify general teaching approaches (such as universal design for higher education) which may create positive learning experiences for all students). Further, diversity and international offices can collaboratively and critically examine student status, recognition of identities, and opportunities to leverage diversity for improved instruction.



3. Global Affinity Networks

Communities that are marginalized or minoritized in one country may find support and guidance from global affinity networks. Global networks focused on indigeneity, LGBTQ populations, disability rights, and women’s rights may support and guide the work of population-based empowerment in U.S. institutions. Although the work for these population groups is often in the purview of equity and diversity offices, international officers can be instrumental in helping groups to develop global affinity networks. Further, U.S.-based empowerment groups may help global affinity groups to benefit from strides made at U.S. institutions. The University of Minnesota, for example, has focused careful attention on meanings and constructions of LGBTQ identities and how they interface with international programs both from a safety standpoint and in terms of creating global alliances.

4. The U.S. is Not the Only Country with Equity Challenges

Equity and diversity officers are tasked with ensuring that institutions address historic legacies of injustice in the United States, ensure inclusion for diverse populations within an institution, and leverage such diversity for improved functioning of the institution. While the U.S. has unique legacies of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and exclusionary practices, the U.S. is not the only country in the world that has either faced or taken efforts to address such issues. Equity and diversity officers may benefit from international examples in their work. Recent changes in higher education in South Africa, India, Brazil, and Europe aimed at becoming more inclusive may serve as models of practice which could inform diversity officers’ work. Policy decisions in the past two decades have aimed at making already robust higher education systems more inclusive. U.S. SIOs may want to contact their counterparts in countries of particular interest to inquire about reforms that can serve as guides for similar policies in the U.S.

5. A Discourse of “Agency” is Missing for International Students

Research about international students has focused largely on the stressors and supports needed for international students and their needs associated with adjusting to new social and academic environments. While such research points to real and relevant issues (Wei, Liao, Heppener, Chao, & Ku, 2012), they are overly-focused on the deficits of international students and not their contributions to the institution. Offices of equity and diversity typically focus on the notion of “agency” for under-represented populations within institutions. The focus on agency, which may include “intentionality and forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness” (Bandura, 2001, p. 2) asserts that students have power and voice in the education process, and that their unique perspectives benefit the educational process. Although such power may be culturally novel to students from collectivist cultures, it is an important aspect of U.S. higher education ideals. When international students encounter challenges, such challenges are sometimes framed as individual issues of cultural adjustment or academic failure. However, when domestic students encounter challenges, equity and diversity offices often view challenges as a result of institutional barriers, not personal deficits of students. Such perspectives present a fresh take on how we might view international students. If such students are viewed as agentic contributors to the broader education



process at institutions, their institutional contributions may grow. Further, if marginalization of international students is viewed as a systemic issue, rather than an issue that is the result of individual challenges, programs and procedures may change for the better at institutions. All of this can happen with a resetting of how we view international students. Equity and diversity officers can help international officers to develop a philosophical mindset for such activities.

In summary, international and diversity work done in siloes misses important opportunity for mutual benefit and institutional improvement. Regular dialogue between such offices may stimulate new ideas and mechanisms for improving the work of both offices, as can learning from other countries' efforts and global affinity networks.

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- Provide an effective voice on significant issues within international education at all levels,
- Improve and promote international education programming and administration within institutions of higher education,
- Establish and maintain a professional network among international education institutional leaders,
- Cooperate in appropriate ways with other national and international groups having similar interests.

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