



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

Spring 2021 Presidential Message

David Fleshler, AIEA President



Dear AIEA Members,

Each of us is continuing to struggle in a world that has been turned upside down over the past year. The pandemic has forced all of us in international higher education to confront unprecedented challenges. We have seen the virtual halt of international students arriving in our countries, the inability to send students out, and questions by policymakers—and even university boards and presidents—about the value of international education.

In the midst of this once-in-a-career set of challenges, our association has pivoted to meet the needs of our members during the turbulence and isolation of this last year. AIEA has been quick to support members during the pandemic by providing new and innovative programming (see those programs [outlined in our last newsletter](#)) that has allowed members to come together, to discuss, and to learn from each other and from renowned experts. We know that many universities have suffered budget cuts, including to international offices. AIEA continues to explore ways to support members, including those colleagues who are facing career transitions. Regardless of your situation, please know that AIEA is here to support you. We invite you to reach out to us with your ideas and suggestions on how best to support you during this time (secretariat@aieworld.org).

We also have provided a robust set of programs, including our Town Halls, so that we all are better prepared for what each of us faces on our campuses—both today and in a post-pandemic world. Many of you joined the AIEA community at a remarkably successful virtual annual conference, with participants from 40+ countries. I especially want to commend the [conference committee](#) and the [Secretariat](#), and particularly thank 2021 Conference Chair Cheryl Matherly, for putting together an extraordinarily successful [Annual Conference](#)—the first virtual conference in AIEA's history. Understanding the current environment, we reduced the cost of attendance—and achieved close to the same numbers as our in-person conferences. Quite a feat, and an indication of the resiliency of our community.

While our Virtual Conference was not the same as being there (and I encourage you to begin making plans now for the 2022 Annual Conference on February 20–23, which we very much hope will be in-person), the 2021 Annual Conference gave all of us the knowledge that we are part of a larger community. I found this sense of connectedness incredibly important at a time when we are still so physically isolated. The Annual Conference provided time to pause and reflect on the past year, and to



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look ahead at the enormous challenges faced by all who work in international higher education. The conference also gave us moments to celebrate—such as achievements in our field through the AIEA Awards Program. For the first time in the association’s history all three award recipients were from outside of the U.S.—Randall Martin (Canada), Philipp Reichert (Canada), and Durban Institute of Technology (South Africa). Congratulations to these deserving recipients!

As the leadership of AIEA—particularly the Board, the Committees, and the Secretariat—looks forward, we seek to understand how AIEA can best meet the needs of its members in a post-COVID world. To best do this, we just invited the entire membership to join one of three task forces: the *AIEA Futures Task Force*, chaired by AIEA President-Elect Jewell Winn of Tennessee State University; the *40th Anniversary Task Force*, co-chaired by Dafina Blacksher Diabate of Lincoln University and Gil Merckx of Duke University; and the *Future Leadership Task Force*, chaired by AIEA Board Member and Legal Advisor Terence (Terry) Miller.

We welcome your active engagement in AIEA and value the perspectives, experience and expertise that you uniquely bring. By reaching out broadly to fill the task forces, we hope to bring new people and new ideas into the leadership pipeline.

Finally, we know that, in addition to the pandemic, all our societies, and particularly the United States, are struggling with systemic racism. We have seen terrible events—from the murder of George Floyd to the murders of 8 people in Atlanta, 6 of whom are from Asian descent, to ongoing racist violence. AIEA is in the process of examining ways in which both our association and our profession can hold true to underlying ideals and values. AIEA recently released a statement condemning racist violence as well as signing, along with other partner associations from around the world, a statement calling for the end of violence against higher education worldwide.

Thank you for all that you do—for AIEA, for your institution, and for international higher education. AIEA thrives because of the work and dedication of so many of our members. Let us all commit to working toward a more just and equitable world as we move AIEA and our institutions into a new post-COVID era.

David Fleshler
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2021–2022 AIEA President