



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

President's Message: A Shared Agenda for SIOs
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For newcomers, the lack of uniformity in the field of international education, including the role of SIO, is probably quite bewildering. There is, for example, no training in specific disciplines or acquisition of certain qualifications that one needs to become an SIO. Most SIOs are members of the faculty but often come from very different disciplines. Others hail from a variety of career backgrounds—as former members of the diplomatic corps, as career administrators within higher education, or even as practicing attorneys. Within the academy, SIOs inhabit vastly different structures and often report to different administrators, with some SIOs accountable to the provost, others to a vice president for student affairs, and some even to administrators ranking one step below vice president. There is also a great deal of variance in the tasks for which SIOs are responsible. The levels of funding that SIOs experience vary considerably, and without the widespread application of recommendations as to how such departments should be funded, some have staff-to-student ratios of 1:50 or less, while others deal with ratios of 1:500 or more. The funding models vary just as much, and range from flat-out appropriations from central administration to tuition capture, a fee-for-service model, grant funding, and a combination of some or all of the above.

In the face of all of this variation, idiosyncrasy, and diversity in the backgrounds, roles, and functioning of SIOs, one wonders whether there are elements that are shared in common. The lack of consensus about so many aspects of this position, at least in terms of what is practiced and can be observed on campuses, may persist for a while longer, but what must demand our attention is a shared agenda for which all SIOs should consistently advocate. Here are a few elements of such an agenda that should not only define the role of the SIO but also be seen by all SIOs as issues they should actively promote:

Global education as part of institutional identity

Colleges and universities seem to be perpetually engaged in strategic planning. This tends to happen with the arrival of a new president. And with the churning that exists in this particular position, SIOs invariably have an opportunity to play a role in this process. Strategic planning provides a chance for SIOs to make international education central to an institution's mission. Indeed, it is only when international education is institutionalized that real progress can be made in terms of ensuring that all students are prepared to succeed in a globalized world. Beyond student learning, the institutionalization of international education is required to support international teaching and research experiences for faculty, as well as for global and interdisciplinary research collaboration. With a strategic commitment to international education, practically all of the other challenges that SIOs face become substantially easier to navigate. SIOs possess the most credible voices for advocating for international education as part of institutional identity and therefore must rise to this challenge.



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Making education central to the work of international education

For much of the history of international education, the primary preoccupation of administrators in this field has been about the provision of services, whether to international students, visiting scholars, or education-abroad students. There is no question that such services are not only important but also necessary, and lie at the very foundation of an international education agenda. However, if these services are not well integrated into the academic enterprise of our colleges and universities, they may constitute little to no educational value to the beneficiaries. Study abroad for example, which is much more closely aligned to the academic mission than some of the other services provided by SIOs, may fail to deliver on the promise of global competence if students spend most of their time overseas in the company of other Americans, have little interaction with the local community, and pursue academic coursework that is not well integrated with their programs of study on the home campus. Furthermore, the depressingly low numbers of students that participate in education abroad means that this potentially transformative experience is enjoyed by only a small minority of students.

SIOs must become the leading campus voices for the internationalization of the curriculum. International education is bigger than study abroad or the hosting of international students on our campuses, which means that SIOs must forge alliances with faculty and seek to influence the conversation on the shape and complexion of the curriculum. Whether it is in the First-Year Seminar, the General Education Curriculum, or even the core themes that will drive learning in the individual disciplines, SIOs must be visible advocates for global learning. Global learning crosses disciplinary boundaries, and, more importantly, is an essential element of what it means to receive a liberal education and to be prepared for global citizenship. For SIOs who feel somewhat insecure in pursuing this agenda, I recommend seeking out the many sessions that will be hosted at the upcoming AIEA conference, as well as conferences, workshops, and webinars offered by groups like AAC&U, ACE, and even NAFSA.

International teaching and research opportunities for faculty

If education is central to the work of international education, it follows that the faculty are the most important actors in this project. Sometimes this is not well understood on campuses, but it is crucial that SIOs are perceived by the faculty to be their most important allies in internationalizing the curriculum in the myriad ways possible. Not all faculty members will embrace this agenda, and indeed, in my own experience, I have observed faculty block strategies to make global learning more central to the experience of all students and even heard chairs discourage young tenure-track faculty from pursuing international opportunities, arguing that it would hurt their chances for tenure. Yes, advocating for international teaching and research opportunities for faculty is something that all SIOs must do, and in the presence of a supportive provost and a sympathetic president, their advocacy may yield real results. The work may involve hosting workshops for Fulbright and other federally funded scholarships and grants; disseminating information about teaching opportunities at partner institutions; providing modest funding to support scouting trips for faculty wishing to lead short-term study abroad programs; and brokering relationships between faculty across borders with similar research/teaching pursuits and interest in



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collaboration. SIOs need to be the loudest voices advocating for international teaching and research opportunities for members of the faculty.

Appropriate funding to support the work of campus internationalization

The marginal status of SIOs on many campuses often means that their positions are the last to be funded and the first to be cut. It also means that they tend to have a lot less than they need to fund the services they provide. Comparing the lavish resources available to athletics departments to the pittance available for international education is often part of the narrative of commiseration among SIOs. That this state of affairs exists on too many campuses is a reflection of institutional priorities. Making international education an institutional priority is, in fact, a responsibility of SIOs, and it is their advocacy that can make the difference. Now that SIOs have begun to occupy fairly senior positions in the academic hierarchy of institutions, at least on paper, they have a bit more power than an international student adviser or an ESL instructor to advocate for more resources in support of international education. Simply accepting the status quo is not good enough.

Aligning institutional rewards to support international engagement

Within organizations, we come to know what is important and what matters by who is rewarded. Moving international education to the center of institutional life requires that those who labor in support of this work be recognized for their accomplishments. Such rewards should be institution-wide and conferred in view of the entire campus community. On my campus, two faculty members and one academic department are identified each year for an honor that celebrates global learning, and they receive this award at the same time that other important honors are conferred by the president. The SIO is perfectly positioned to advocate for the creation of such awards and to lobby for those most eligible for consideration. On practically every campus, the work of international education involves changing institutional culture. Rewarding faculty, staff, and students for their leadership in international education is a crucial aspect of fostering a new institutional culture that embraces international education. Here again, SIOs must be the most effective champions.

In the coming years, the SIO position, including the path to this position, how it is structured on campuses, and the portfolio of responsibilities over which the SIO presides may very well achieve greater similarity and consistency. We do not need to wait for this to happen, however, to become champions of the agenda articulated above. Indeed, this must be a shared agenda, for only through the power of our numbers advocating for these progressive ideas in unison can we inspire the imagination of college and university administrators to make international education a core principle of institutional identity.

Harvey Charles, 2014 AIEA President