



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

Dear AIEA Colleagues,

When we ask ourselves, “Why does our work in higher education matter?” there are some easy answers. Most of us embrace the mission of international education whole-heartedly, and extending that mission to people and places around the globe is natural for us. For example, many of us may hope that we help young people better understand and contribute to a brighter future for all. It is natural for us to think idealistically of building bridges and creating, fruitful coalitions. Despite these humane and worthy—and very real—reasons for embracing our work, I also am aware of strong undercurrents that make it more than the sunny, optimistic future-building implied in much of the rhetoric around internationalization. There are forces that require us to be very aware and incisive in order to prevent real harm to education worldwide.

At the 2012 conference of our partner organization, the European Association of International Educators (EAIE), participants were invited to focus on a number of useful topics, including hard evidence of the extent of fraud in higher education. Fraud affects all countries internally, but is particularly hard to identify in certain international transactions. The result is an undermining of key relationships that help students reach their potential. On the other side of the equation, there is the potential that hopeful students will move far from home only to meet with poor preparation (or downright fraud) on the part of campuses that have eagerly recruited them. The result can be very lonely for students and very damaging for the institution and even the nation involved.

To address some of these concerns, AIEA is part of a coalition of associations that helped to develop a “Global Charter” to protect student rights. Watch the AIEA website for more details and the full text of the charter.

Many countries have seen instances—blessedly rare—of the sad collision of both trends, where fraud meets neglect, and deportation or financial collapse follows. Fortunately, few institutions sink to such depths of financial fraud and reputational apocalypse. However, as leaders in international education, we find ourselves worrying about helping our own institutions avoid “slippery slopes.” The stakes have become higher over time, the numbers larger (both in people affected and dollars lost). Remaining in a “wait and see” stance is no longer an option, but how do we effectively guide decision-making on our campuses?

We need our professional networks and best practice sessions more than ever. As we press forward with our new strategic agenda, AIEA is dedicated to supporting its members in bringing the best examples of good strategies for an institution to move into the international realm with confidence, awareness, and strong core values. This remains true even though each institution will evolve along lines specific to its context, history, and mission.

Senior International Officers are not in a position any longer (if indeed we ever were) to be the international gurus who help our faculty, staff, and students travel and learn, or the institutional ambassadors who greet the incoming international students and visitors. Rather, our positions as Senior International Officers demand tough ethical discussions, critical arguments for resources, and formulation of long-range visions that will preserve and strengthen the reputation of higher education across many sectors and in many cultural settings. Our leadership is needed now more than ever on our campuses. It matters more than ever because there is much to gain and much to lose. As AIEA President, I ask you, then, to be an active member of AIEA and to join the discussion through committees, our annual conference, and other avenues provided through the association. We need what each of us brings collectively to this increasingly demanding leadership role. To keep our voices strong in the challenging and necessary leadership moments ahead, we will require up-to-the-minute information and well-supported, authoritative arguments, developed through reliable networks with respected colleagues. That's where AIEA—with your participation—can be an essential resource.

Sincerely,

Donna Scarboro
2012 AIEA President