



**Association of International Education Administrators**  
*Leaders in International Higher Education*

**Spring 2015 Presidential Message**  
*Jenifer Cushman, AIEA President*



Dr. Jenifer Cushman

One of the challenges facing leaders in international education today is how we might offer global learning opportunities to less privileged populations, for example students in Appalachian Ohio, where I am located. President Obama's free tuition community college proposal<sup>1</sup> brings national attention to the obligation to educate non-traditional students towards twenty-first century skills. Lists of twenty-first century skills and themes<sup>2</sup> often include global awareness and cross-cultural competencies along with technological literacy, innovation, and collaboration. Uneven access to learning opportunities for such skills, however, means that non-traditional populations can be both limited in their access to such opportunities and less receptive to the opportunities when they are presented.

Fortunately, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has identified a number of High Impact Practices and pedagogies that are shown to affect non-traditional students positively, including global and experiential education such as study abroad. While we know from Open Doors that fewer than 10% of all undergraduates study abroad – and, with mortgages, families, and jobs, non-traditional students are usually not in that 10% -- if study abroad is embedded in an academic or career path, participation can grow. However, to “universalize global learning” – the focus of the 2014 AIEA conference -- we must explore other global learning opportunities, for example the SUNY COIL model, which connects faculty and students technologically with counterparts at international partner institutions. Such alternatives to study abroad provide nontraditional and other underrepresented students in study abroad opportunities to develop skills they need to succeed in the twenty-first century.

These and other big questions were discussed at the 2015 AIEA conference in Washington DC Feb. 15-18. Through the theme of “Leading Global Learning: Envisioning New Paradigms,” sessions and speakers rose to the challenge of the changing higher education landscape by exploring leadership questions such as how do we as educators and leaders anticipate and embrace the challenges of the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/building-american-skills-through-community-colleges>

<sup>2</sup> Among others, see <http://www.p21.org/about-us/p21-framework/57>; [http://www.imls.gov/about/21st\\_century\\_skills\\_list.aspx](http://www.imls.gov/about/21st_century_skills_list.aspx); and <http://edglossary.org/21st-century-skills/>



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higher education landscape of the early twenty-first century, and prepare our students to navigate this unfamiliar topography? I left the conference encouraged by the enthusiasm and generosity of attendees and conference committee members. According to our post-conference evaluations, 82% of attendees found the conference very good or outstanding. Comments indicated that our participants found it “well organized” with “excellent” plenary speakers and “very pertinent” sessions. Like others, I continue to be impressed with the sessions our members present, and appreciate the opportunity for leaders in international higher education to interact with each other on a manageable scale.

Attendees say that the highlights were undoubtedly our plenary speakers. Our opening speaker “grandfather of the MOOC” Dr. George Siemens kicked off conversations with a provocative challenge to “change and become” in the context of five changing trends in higher education: digitization, integrated system to ecosystem, new learner profiles (including non-traditional students), alternative credentialing, and university relationship to society. We were honored by the presence of university presidents from outside of the US for our President’s Plenary. AIEA Past-President Harvey Charles moderated a sagacious dialogue among [Fernando León-García, President of CETYS University](#), [Prins Nevhtalu, Vice-Chancellor of Cape Peninsula University of Technology](#), and [Roseann O’Reilly Runte, President and Vice-Chancellor of Carleton University](#) that featured a video message from [Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad, President of the University of Qatar](#). Our Association Breakfast Speaker Eva Egron-Polak, Secretary-General of the International Association of Universities presented thought-provoking data comparing priorities at US institutions of higher education with those around the world. Finally, our closing plenary luncheon speaker Al-Jazeera America host Wajahat Ali delivered the perfect end to our conference, with his side-splitting and stimulating account of his time as head of the Muslim Student Association at UC Berkeley after 9/11, with a poignant reminder about the importance of telling our stories, especially in international education.

I am deeply appreciative to all who contributed to the success of the 2015 conference, especially the AIEA Secretariat, the Conference Committee, and the interns and volunteers who smoothed our progress through the week. Of course, the soul of the conference was provided by our fabulous speakers and our members, whose substantive and engaging sessions lay at the heart of our gathering. We invite you to continue our compelling conversations at the 2016 AIEA conference in Montreal for the theme “Building a Better World: The Academy as Leader.”

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