



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

Lifelong Learning and Global Engagement Keys to Success

Adapted from remarks delivered by University of Virginia Executive Vice President and Provost John Simon at the University's Fall Convocation on October 26, 2012.

As the chief academic officer at the University of Virginia, I believe it is vitally important our students graduate with the tools necessary to be leaders in our globally competitive and changing world.

I was recently reminded of the importance of this mission when my father told me of his plans to go to Russia this past summer. My dad is 80 years old, and he thought he would never be able to visit Russia. For most of his adult life, the United States was engaged in a Cold War with the Soviet Union, and every May he would watch the parade in Red Square on television, observing the Soviet troops march by and the tanks and missiles roll by. It seemed impossible that an American citizen would one day be able to travel freely there. But then the world changed. Listening to my father's anticipation of his long-delayed trip to Russia and his emotional recounting, afterward, of walking across Red Square reminded me we must all be able to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The way to do that is to be a life-long learner and willing and able to engage the world.

I am convinced a liberal arts education is more important today than when I experienced it 35 years ago. But education does not end with the conferment of a degree. Students will likely work longer than people in my generation, and the pace of change has increased to a point where young people will need to be adept at how to learn and how to adapt to rapid changes in the work place and society. I do not believe that faculty can continue to assume we know all the details of the world in which students will live, have families and careers, and contribute to communities; faculty no longer know what various professions will demand from students or what the requirements for success will be. Opportunities are becoming increasingly global, making it difficult for students to be sure where they will be making their lives. They will likely change careers several times and for some, success will be measured more by teamwork than individual accomplishments. Many of these teams will include members from all parts of the globe, and students may know some of these team members only through communications enabled by technology. Successes will likely arise from integrating knowledge across disciplines, and understanding different cultures. Most important, students will need to know how to learn on a permanent, continuous basis – everyone will need to be a lifelong learner.

In his book *Future Shock*, Allen Toffler quotes Psychologist Herbert Gerjuoy of the Human Resources Research Organization as follows: “The new education must teach the individual how to classify and reclassify information, how to evaluate its veracity, how to change categories when necessary, how to move from the concrete to the abstract and back, how to look at problems from a new direction—how to teach himself,” he quoted Gerjuoy. “Tomorrow’s illiterate will not be the man who can’t read; he will be the man who has not learned how to learn.” Being a life-long learner creates opportunities for our students to change the world in positive ways through leadership.

When I ponder what it means to engage the world or embrace and pursue leadership opportunities in the world as a college student, I am unsure of the answer. Students can learn about the world at schools that offer courses with international content. They can get to know fellow students and professors from different countries. But is this enough? And will students be willing to step outside their comfort zones when opportunities present themselves?

Over the last few years, I have written scientific papers with colleagues in eight countries – Poland, Japan, India, China, England, Italy, Turkey, and Wales. If you had asked me when I started as an Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of California, San Diego, in 1985, I would have told you I would never imagine being part of any international collaboration – after all, at that point in time we all thought the best science was done in the United States, and outstanding people around the world wanted to move to the United States to do their science. But in recent years, scientific literature has become truly global. I have needed to learn and relearn over these 25 years to engage in research, in response to how the world has changed during that time.

I did not leave North America for the first time until 1980; I was 23 years old and I travelled to England, spending most of my time at Oxford University. It was the first time in my life that I saw a world map where the United State was not in the center. When I pointed it out, my English friends replied that of course, Europe and England in particular, are always in the center of a world map.

Over the last two decades, science has taken me many places — some of them outside my comfort zone. As Dr. Seuss titled his last book “Oh the Places You’ll Go”! I have visited many cities and universities in China, made several trips to Japan and Korea and travelled extensively throughout Europe. When I became an administrator, I found myself travelling all over the globe in a different capacity, for example conducting business with government officials in the Middle East. My travels exposed me to different cultures, and taught me that I needed to work within local customs; but I always came home to the U.S. Through these experiences, I became engaged with the world, and this global engagement changed me, changed how I view the world, changed how I do my work, and changed how I interact and relate to other people.

One of my closest scientific collaborators is Shosuke Ito. He is a world renowned chemist in Japan. I first met him in 2002 at a meeting in Egmond aan Zee, a village on the North Sea coast in the Dutch province of North Holland. I had listened to Sho talk at meetings before, but we had never spoken or corresponded. By accident, we had breakfast together at that meeting, talked about our lives, began exploring potential areas of mutual interest, and discussed what we could

possibly do together. Since 2003, I have co-authored over a dozen papers with Sho, many of which have received significant media attention. We have written multi-country grants together. He became a dean; I became a vice provost, then provost. We shared administrative challenges and sought advice from one another. We have served on advisory and editorial boards together. But we do not meet face-to-face. We have what I would call a deep “electronic” relationship. We know a lot about each other; we know all about each other’s families; we have developed a meaningful friendship enabled by technology, one of great trust and mutual admiration.

As I enter the final decades of my career, new graduates are beginning theirs. What I have experienced as an emerging global landscape will become their global training ground. When I started my career at U.C.S.D. 25 years ago, a close friend who was 25 years my senior predicted the rapid advancement of technology that was nascent at that time would result in the homogenization of global cultures. What he found interesting in the world, he believed, would be lost as the world would migrate to some “average” culture. I think the last two decades have proved him wrong.

Because the world is not homogenous, we, as educators, must help our students acquire the skills and knowledge needed to work in and with different cultures. We must provide experiential opportunities to work with those different peoples on grounds and off. To succeed, students must avail themselves of these opportunities, move outside their comfort zones, and learn what it means to engage globally.

Many students at the University of Virginia are already doing this. In 2011-2012, 1324 undergraduates participated in an educational abroad experience; the top five destination countries were Spain (15%), United Kingdom (11.5%), France (9%), Italy, and Germany. The top five majors participating were Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Spanish, and History. The most popular time to have the experience abroad is in the summer (about 50%). The number of students who engaged in education abroad has remained constant over the last 6 academic years. This latter fact intrigued me, so I brought it up at a meeting with the elected chairs of the student schools councils. When I asked why more undergraduate students were not engaging in study abroad during the academic year, I learned many did not want to miss a single semester at my institution. But this is wrongheaded and I believe we should all be challenging our students to broaden their horizons during their college careers. Experiences and engagement beyond university life will provide meaning to their lives, and will serve to enrich the time they do spend at school.

If you don’t believe me, believe Thomas Jefferson — he provided a good model for global engagement. As much as he loved his home at Monticello and the pastoral environs of Albemarle County, Jefferson frequently traveled to other countries. He soaked up everything he saw overseas. His ideas were shaped by his experiences abroad and his comparative study of the politics, economics, and architecture of other nations. When he founded U.Va., he said it would be “based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind,” and he knew the human mind could not be constrained by national borders or other traditional limitations of geography.

Like Jefferson, we need to step out of our comfort zones to become fully engaged global citizens.

To close, I want to share some perspectives on global engagement beyond my own. To gather these insights, I pursued what I believe to be two of the most important actions of a leader - asking the right question of the community one leads, and listening. I asked many of my colleagues - including deans, global health experts and professors of politics, history, business, and cancer biology - the following question: “What must students experience as part of their education to be prepared for success as global leaders?” What I learned caused me to reflect on my own administrative priorities as well as my career aspirations to be recognized for scientific accomplishments by a global community.

In the spirit of David Letterman, I assembled my colleagues’ advice into a top ten list for how students should prepare for leadership on a global scale.¹

- 10.** Get a strong liberal arts education first, and specialize later. Take lots of different types of courses and classes that encourage to meeting different kinds of people and learning about the world in unexpected ways. Many skills can be taught, but critical thinking, which comes from that liberal arts exposure, is not easily acquired but is valuable globally and locally. See everything as a learning opportunity.
- 9.** Understand your origins - global also means understanding your own country, community, or enterprise. It doesn't just mean understanding what is foreign.
- 8.** Students should take a full semester abroad and immerse themselves in an unfamiliar environment. There is nothing like leaving the comfort of the familiar to spark the curiosity necessary for discovery, to foster the empathy required for human connection, and to develop the respect for others’ experiences essential for collaboration. Short, superficial engagements will not identify the questions nor lead to answers or solutions.
- 7.** Have friends from different backgrounds and walks of life. Strong leaders, domestic or international, know how to connect with many different kinds of people.
- 6.** Students should develop a sense of cultural humility or literacy. Be respectful of the reasons for difference. There are many different value systems, beliefs and religions around the world.
- 5.** Students should learn to bring out the best in themselves and others and know their values and be courageous enough to lead, collaborate, and make decisions based upon them.

¹ I want to acknowledge those who took the time to provide the thoughtful responses quoted in this list: Harry Harding (Dean of the Batten School), David Toscano (one of our local delegates to the Virginia General Assembly), Richard Handler (the founder of UVAs Global Development Studies program), Richard Guerrant and Becca Dillingham (the past and current Directors of UVAs Center for Global Health), Brantly Womack (Politics), David Breneman (Univ Prof), Philip Zelikow (History) Lynn Isabella (Darden) and Marie-Louise Hammarskjold (Microbiology, Immunology, and Cancer Biology).

4. Think locally and act globally. In the 21st century, the old line between what is 'foreign' and what is 'domestic' is vanishing. Domestic or local problems are frequently just the local face of global phenomena, and solutions will be mediated by global conditions and institutions.
3. Learn languages. Learn to communicate – the first ten words are the most important, and studying languages is the best form of respect.
2. Develop the ability to deal with complex problems at a systemic level. The larger and more diverse the community, the more numerous the problems, and thus the greater the difficulty in securing consensus about which ones are more important, and there will be divergent values that different elements of the community will want to see honored in the design of solutions.
1. Be a “traditioned innovator;” I first heard this phrase from my friend Greg Jones when he was Dean of Divinity at Duke University. Understand history and culture so that you can see ways of bringing the past into the present in an innovative way.

I encourage students to keep this list in mind as they learn to learn, and as they engage global opportunities and challenges. The items in this list provide some of the steps necessary to effective leadership in the world that awaits them.

I'd like to close with one more essential step offered in the conclusion of Cal Newport's recent op-ed piece published in the New York Times on September 29, 2012, entitled “Follow a Career Passion? Let it follow you.”

“To young people who constantly wonder if the grass might be greener on the other side of the occupational fence, I offer this advice: Passion is not something you follow. It's something that will follow you as you put in the hard work to become valuable to the world.”