



AIEA PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

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**Engaging Globally with People and Issues,
Locally, Nationally and Internationally**

Robert E. Page • *Arizona State University*

Provost





PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

Name: Robert E. Page

Title: Provost, Arizona State University

Time served as Provost: 8 months (as of July, 2014)

Located in the southwest United States, Arizona State University is a comprehensive public research university with over 76,000 students (graduate and undergraduate). Often referred to as “the New American University,” the mandate of ASU is to combine access and excellence as our key operating principles. Its goal is to be “inclusive” rather than “exclusive,” and to offer all of our students the tools and support needed to have a successful academic experience while matriculating at our university. ASU also is a university strongly dedicated to forging and sustaining a culture where transdisciplinary thinking and collaboration can thrive. Finally, ASU is a university strongly committed to global engagement—harnessing local knowledge for global impact and utilizing global knowledge to enhance our local situation.

Robert E. Page Jr. is the University Provost and Foundation Chair of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. Dean Page joined ASU in 2004 after 15 years on the faculty of the UC-Davis where he served as chair of entomology. His background is in behavior and population genetics. Page’s current research focuses on the evolution of complex social behavior. Using the honey bee as a model, Page has dissected bees’ complex foraging division of labor at all levels of biological organization — from gene networks to complex social interactions.

Provost Page is charged with the stewardship of Arizona State University. He is building on his work as the Founding Director of ASU’s School of Life Sciences, where he launched the university’s first fully integrated, interdisciplinary academic unit. He also served as Vice Provost and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.



Given all of the demands and constraints facing higher education today, why did your institution decide to internationalize?

As our students graduate from Arizona State University, they will be facing a work place environment that is global. It is not something that is about to come or will be having an impact soon, it is now and it is influencing the way virtually all aspects of the economy and governments operate. Our university vision is one of a globally engaged university in keeping with this reality. Our goal is to have global reach and global impact. President Crow, upon his arrival at ASU in 2002, articulated 8 design principles that form the foundation of ASU. One of those was titled “Engage Globally: ASU engages with people and issues, locally, nationally and internationally.” As a result, we have been advancing our engagement throughout the world for more than 12 years as a conscious strategy of positioning the university as one that is pro-actively globally engaged.

This commitment to global engagement is multi-dimensional. We seek this role to ensure our students have opportunities to develop an understanding of the larger world in which they live and work and how they may contribute to influencing its overall development. We seek to have students from other countries to expose our domestic students to different cultures and experiences that can be shared in curricular and extra-curricular contexts. In addition, we have built partnerships with many overseas universities and have developed some programs that offer students experiences abroad they might not otherwise have considered. For example, we have a new masters program that is being offered collaboratively with Dublin City University. But being global is not only about our educational mission; it also is linked strongly to our research mission and our desire to promote opportunities for discovery through international collaborations. Like many universities, our faculty collaborate with colleagues around the world. However, we are seeking to build strategic partnerships so that some of our research activities and centers or institutes will be collaborative in nature with other universities and think tanks. We expect this will broaden opportunities for scholarly inquiry and provide an enhanced forum for our doctoral students to pursue their work.

We do not see our efforts at globalization as a choice. It is a strategic imperative that is driven by the very nature of the world. To ignore it would put our university in peril. To embrace it provides the opportunities for us to advance our mission and more readily accomplish our goal of preparing our students to live and work effectively and ethically in the globalized world of the 21st century.



Has the role or importance of internationalization at your institution changed over the past five years? If so, how?

Our role in international activities has grown over the past five years as a result of our foundational commitment to establish the university as one that is proactively globally engaged. Some of our changes over the past five years have been to establish stronger and more substantive partnerships with universities and other entities around the world. We have now done so in China, Vietnam, India, Mexico, Ireland, and elsewhere. We have greatly increased the number of international students from other countries now attending ASU and have developed many academic program partnerships that facilitate students moving from undergraduate degrees in their home countries to graduate degrees at ASU.

We also have learned how to help our international students make the transition more effectively as they come to study at ASU. As a result, they are achieving higher levels of academic success and having more meaningful cross cultural experiences in the US. This effort has involved considerable effort from many campus constituencies and has resulted in much higher retention rates for our students attending from around the world.

Over the past five years we have built deeper relationships with universities which have involved more on-going faculty collaborations, visiting faculty, program partnerships, and other initiatives aimed at fulfilling our aspirations and that of our partner universities. Simply stated, we hope these relationships become more collaborative across multiple dimensions.

All of the activities discussed here started because of our desire to see our students learn more about the international sphere. However, they are now being driven by our students wanting more opportunities for international learning. We have greatly increased the number of students seeking and receiving Fulbright awards, have increased the number of our students participating in the Peace Corps upon graduation, and we continue to grow the number of options for study abroad.

As we go forward in the coming years, we expect to have better systems to manage our global engagement. It is not enough to have a person in charge but rather it requires considerable efforts at coordination and communication within the institution to make internationalization work well. We expect our international student body will continue to grow and we will continue to seek to diversify our student body from around the world. While we have students from well over 100 different countries, we are also seeking to increase the



number of students from many of these s. In so doing, we will continue to work on providing better transitional support for all students.

What were some of the main challenges you and your campus faced in pursuing internationalization? What are some of assets you and your institution drew on for this work?

Making an institutional decision to expand the university's global reach required us to make certain investments. First and foremost, we had to hire individuals with the critical expertise we needed for us to engage in specific targeted regions of the world. While not all, most were individuals with distinguished academic careers that reflected the content expertise we needed and also had demonstrated an ability to provide leadership in helping institutions to internationalize. In addition to those with academic credentials, we had to hire individuals among our staff with language proficiency in key targeted countries/regions who could help administer our initiatives. We also had to train our other staff and academic leaders to work with individuals from different cultures. The latter included specific training for academic leaders visiting other countries on behalf of the university to ensure they were familiar with the cultural traditions and the communication/decision-making approaches they would encounter in their meetings.

Second, we had to develop a network from among our existing faculty to see how we could leverage individual relationships (and sometimes many within one country and/or university) to become institutional relationships. This meant first identifying such faculty and their activities and then asking those leading our internationalization initiatives to invest time and energy reaching out to individual faculty members, and incorporating where possible, such faculty members into larger strategies and actual in-country meetings.

Third, we also had to take many academic leaders (deans, school directors, department chairs) to visit university leaders in the countries where we sought to build a presence. This was designed to build relationships that could lead to various forms of concrete cooperation and collaboration and to establish memoranda of understanding for students to attend ASU whether as part of a 3+2 agreement (wherein students complete the fourth year of their studies from their home university and transfer credits back to earn their BA/BS degree and then stay for a one year ASU masters degree) or other arrangement (e.g., visiting students for Ph.D. programs, student exchanges, etc).

Fourth, we needed to build within our Office of Knowledge Enterprise Development (OKED) the capacity to advance international initiatives in research and to acquire external funding. The Senior Vice President



responsible for OKED, who reports to the President, undertook this task and has built a robust unit that has been instrumental in our success.

Fifth, our Sr. Vice President for Educational Outreach and Student Services invested in his staff so that they could develop more resources to help international students acclimate better to the university and community, and to create a more welcoming climate. This has been a very important initiative because without it, recruiting international students would not have continued to be successful.

Sixth, we have built teams comprised of members of individual academic units and enrollment services to ensure that agreements created to provide opportunities for students in other countries to attend ASU were continually monitored and those relationships nurtured to ensure continued success. It also is critical that our units engage in a manner that sees these relationships as a two-way street; otherwise the likelihood of long-term achievement of our goals is diminished.

Lastly, we made a decision not to have a single, fully dedicated senior international officer. Instead, we placed overall responsibility for oversight and coordination in the hands of a Deputy Provost. In such a large comprehensive university, the size and scope of our global engagements precludes placing total managerial responsibility in the hands of one individual. Rather, leveraging ASU's decentralized administrative model, the Provost has felt it better to see the role of the central administration as more of a coordination/communication task than one of defining specific individual initiatives on an on-going basis in various parts of the world.

So the critical task was to organize ourselves in a manner that would help us attain our global goals. We had some missteps, but we learned from each one and have advanced substantially from our initial efforts.

What is an example of an internationalization effort on your campus that was not completely successful? Why was that the case, and what did your institution learn from it?

The decision to advance an effort in another country requires a great deal of preparation and thoughtfulness about what will work, what may not, and who can lead such efforts at the operational level. It is fine for the President to build an opening with his efforts to expand the reach of the university, it is another thing for the university to be prepared to take hold of the opportunity and to make it work. Our challenges have been, on occasion that we have not, as I mentioned above, taken full advantage of the expertise we have on our faculty



to achieve university goals and on occasion, we have taken an approach that did not work because of our lack of preparedness.

Conversely, please discuss an example of an initiative that did work, and why.

As mentioned above, linkages to our own faculty are important and being able to take advantage of our efforts at the college or school level is also critical. Our Fulton Schools of Engineering was approached to help with an initiative of critical interest to Intel Corporation and the Government of Vietnam that involved the training of engineers. This opportunity was facilitated by our leader of international initiatives and executive education in the Fulton Schools of Engineering. The Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program (HEEAP) was created. It is a consortium of higher education institutions, industry and government partners, whose goal is to develop a highly skilled technical workforce that will attract and sustain a healthy high-tech manufacturing industry, thus positioning Vietnam to compete among high-tech centers of excellence and provide both economic and societal impact.

Responding to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs' plans for better science and technology graduates, the academic partners, guided by government and industry partners, recruit and train engineering professors from Vietnamese universities and vocational colleges, develop curricula, and increase collaboration between universities and industry. The project helps train select professors to prepare students with the technical expertise, proficiency in English, and the soft skills and competencies needed to succeed in the emerging Vietnamese high-tech manufacturing sector.

The alliance focuses on developing and advancing interdisciplinary and applied engineering curriculum through instructional innovation. Industry partners play an integral role in shaping engineering training and curriculum, and benefit from access to highly trained graduates as well as university and business. Major investors have been USAID and Intel Vietnam, and we have provided some cost share..

This initiative has been successful because it provides a link between our expertise and the needs articulated by the Vietnam government. As a result, this is a sustainable activity that has grown in size and is now looking to expand its reach to other initiatives of the Vietnamese government that include social sciences as well as engineering.



Who are the most important stakeholders you work with regarding internationalization at your institution?

The ability of the university to develop a strong international presence requires engagement of a wide network of stakeholders. As our goal was initially set by the President and actively supported by the Provost, it was then crucial to engage the deans. At the same time, it is important that while working with deans, we advance the initiatives of “early adopters” so others can learn from their initiatives and see the positive outcomes that accrue. Now, most units now have an international presence, some extensive and some just in the early stages of development. Nonetheless, they all have engaged to some degree.

Second, we had to work with the deans on engaging their school directors and department chairs. This level of leadership in the university is critical to getting the depth of engagement we sought. Fortunately, we have encountered little resistance. Indeed, our initiatives have been embraced widely. Our approach has never been to compel any unit to enter this arena, but rather to identify opportunities and help them see how their unit would benefit by such engagement.

Third, OKED is a critical stakeholder, as it leads our research initiatives, economic development activities with our state and local leaders, and is instrumental in identifying opportunities for funding for initiatives that support international efforts, is a critical stakeholder. This unit has its own Global Development unit specifically designed to build our capacity and acquire external resources. Moreover, OKED has been instrumental in building new institutional relationships that emerge through external funding opportunities. These have resulted in new relationships abroad with universities where research collaborations are the foundation.

Fourth, as mentioned earlier, we have had the support of our student services unit. Within the Provost’s office we ensured that our study abroad office was engaged and understood our goals. We also engaged our enrollment services unit which is responsible for student recruitment, as they had to be familiar with all agreements signed, the terms of those agreements, etc. so they could properly administer the admissions processes for students on 3+2, those direct entry as first year students, those who have conditional acceptance pending completion of an ASU run English language proficiency program, etc.

Beyond these groups and the leaders of various units, each of these people have in turn reached out to their constituencies to build a stronger commitment to our goals. While nothing works perfectly and we continue to seek improvements, we are pleased with the progress to date led by these stakeholders.



What are some of the key ways in which senior international officers can help individuals in your role advance internationalization at their institutions?

Numerous opportunities to pursue global initiatives are available for Arizona State University as well as other universities. Senior international officers are critical not only for identifying opportunities, but for evaluating each to see if each is consonant with institutional goals. Is the institution the kind of institution with whom we want to partner? Can we help them and can they help us? Do we have the necessary commitment from within our academic units and, as appropriate, individual faculty members to participate? Will we be a better institution as a result of our engagement in this relationship? Indeed, there are many questions and experienced international leaders in the university possess the nuanced skills to assess each recommend which should be advanced. This is a critical role as our engagement with various universities and government agencies around the world tend to be reciprocal; we always need to be mindful of which partners present the most appropriate opportunities for engagement.

Our international leaders also play an essential role in helping others in leadership roles see the full scope of opportunity presented by partnerships with overseas universities. In this regard, it is important to see these partnerships as multi-dimensional involving educational initiatives, research activities, international economic development, etc. Over time, we have learned that the most successful collaborations are those that have multiple touch points and programmatic elements with our international partner institutions. A good example of this is our multifaceted relationship with Sichuan University in China.

Is there anything else you would like to share with senior international officers or fellow chief academic officers?

The decision to engage globally is one that presents enormous opportunities for Arizona State University and for all others who wish to position themselves in this sphere. There is a great understanding in developing nations about the need for an educated work force and its critical role in the country's economic and social development. As such, countries with well-developed higher education systems like the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and others are sought out to partner and, in some cases; help build the higher education infrastructure. These present great challenges and opportunities to contribute to the development of students throughout the world and help individual nations with their efforts to build better higher education systems.



However, with great opportunities come tremendous challenges. As a large, complex research university, our continued success in this arena depends on many things. The stakeholders mentioned above, the continued development of new opportunities, the deeper engagement of faculty and students in international efforts, the coordination and communication internally of what is going on and why so that it is easier to engage those who need to be participating, and lastly, we need to ensure we take on that which we can accomplish and not extend ourselves beyond our capacity to be meaningfully engaged with our partner universities.

There is much to be enthusiastic about with respect to global development of our university. We embrace it and are constantly looking to advance our international presence. As we do that, we continue to learn and we work hard to translate that learning so we can avoid the same mistakes in the future. Nonetheless, we believe in the strategic necessity of being an active participant in global education and research initiatives.



The **Association of International Education Administrators** (AIEA), a membership organization formed in November 1982, is composed of institutional leaders engaged in advancing the international dimensions of higher education. The purposes of the Association are to:

- Provide an effective voice on significant issues within international education at all levels,
- Improve and promote international education programming and administration within institutions of higher education,
- Establish and maintain a professional network among international education institutional leaders,
- Cooperate in appropriate ways with other national and international groups having similar interests.

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