

Acting as Global Citizens: A Challenge to U.S. Colleges and Universities

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS in the United States are increasingly using the language of “global citizenship” to describe the skills and habits they seek to cultivate in their students. The journey to global citizenship frequently focuses on the exploration of personal and social responsibility in the context of an interconnected world. In an earlier article for NAFSA’s *Trends & Insights* series, I noted the variety of ways global citizenship can be interpreted: (1) as a choice and way of thinking; (2) as self-awareness and awareness of others; (3) as the practice of cultural empathy; (4) as the cultivation of principled decision making; and (5) as participation in the social and political life of one’s community. Institutions can be proud indeed if they are succeeding in cultivating these worthy habits of mind in their students.

But shouldn’t colleges and universities be models for global citizens as well? According to the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the growing global conversation around “rethinking internationalization,” the answer is yes. Colleges and universities are part of a global system of higher education, in which their actions matter and have an impact on others. In “Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call to Action,” a recent statement and call to action, IAU points not only to the widely agreed-upon benefits of internationalization, but also to warn of the possible adverse consequences that are increasingly apparent as internationalization efforts mature and intensify in the context of increased globalization. Such potential negative aspects and those already visible include the dominance of English at the cost of linguistic diversity; the pursuit of the single model of excellence of the “world-class university” at the cost of differentiated institutional missions and potentially unwise investments; brain drain; questionable practices in recruiting and the challenges of providing a quality experience for international students; unevenly shared institutional benefits of internationalization; and the pursuit of international reputation and resources at the expense of academic values. IAU calls on higher education institutions to affirm academic and socially responsible values and goals that un-

derpin their internationalization efforts, and asks institutions everywhere to “act as responsible global citizens, committed to help shape a global system of higher education that values academic integrity, quality, equitable access, and reciprocity.”

In “Higher Education Internationalization: Seeking a New Balance of Values,” a 2012 NAFSA *Trends & Insights* essay, IAU Secretary-General Eva Egron-Polak elaborated on the values affirmed in the call to action. While no one in higher education would argue with these ethical values and morally sound principles, it is always easier to affirm values than to operationalize them. So what does this call to action mean concretely for institutions as they engage with the world? Below are several questions to guide reflection as institutions seek to live by their principles.

To what extent do our practices in recruiting and providing a positive educational and social experience for international students align with the values and principles we articulate?

The race to recruit international students is a global one. In the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the drive for revenue has put intense pressure on institutions to diversify their sources of income, with international student recruitment figuring prominently among them. At the same time, institutions are sincere in pointing to the contribution of international students



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to increasing the diversity and intellectual vibrancy of the campus. We like to think that this reason is paramount, but the pressures of prestige and income are powerful and the dangers of their pursuit are well-known. The use of recruiting agents is controversial, and at the very least, they must be carefully chosen and supervised. Cutting corners on admissions standards—however students are recruited—hurts students and the institution. Recruiting a majority of international students from a single country makes social integration into campus life problematic. And too many institutions have ramped up their goals without planning for the accompanying investment in student services, language support, or programs to facilitate integration into the local and campus community. Institutions that recruit only full-paying international students will have few international students from developing countries or from less affluent families. In a word, because recruiting and educating international students are the most visible and talked-about manifestation

of internationalization, policies and practices in this arena should exemplify principled decision-making.

To what extent are our international partnerships truly mutually beneficial?

It is not unusual for partner institutions to have different levels of resources and prestige. Inequality of capacity and resources divide rich nations from developing ones, and well-established and prestigious institutions from less well-known and resourced ones. Although the partners may be unequal in certain ways, a partnership can and should provide mutual benefits. The challenge of equally beneficial partnerships is twofold: First, to be open to a wide choice of partners so that cooperation is not limited to institutions that are comparable (or greater) in wealth or prestige and thus provide prestige by association; and second, to ensure that all partners benefit equally, recognizing that the benefits might look quite different for each one. Achieving such parity can be especially

challenging when the richer nation or the more established institution is the conduit for resources that support the partnership. Thus, it is important for each party in developing partnerships to be explicit about intended benefits and outcomes, and incumbent on the more “powerful” partner to be vigilant about ensuring a balanced picture.

To what extent do our international engagements contribute to the economic, social, cultural, and educational well-being of the partner institution, nation, and its communities, and adhere to principles of quality, transparency, accountability, and equity?

International engagement and cross-border education can take many forms—including partnerships, campuses and programs abroad (face-to-face and virtual, or some combination thereof), mobility of faculty and students, research cooperation, off-shore programs, and development projects. As noted above, U.S. institutions

naturally focus first on the benefits of internationalization to their own students and faculty. If higher education institutions are to be global citizens, they also must consider how their actions affect the partner institution and its surroundings. Do the programs that provide faculty in other countries with opportunities to earn an advanced degree at your institution contribute to brain drain? Could they be conceived in other ways? Does your campus or program abroad provide instruction in low-cost programs, leaving the universities in the host country to support the higher cost programs without the benefit of cross-subsidy? Does your off-shore or partnership program contribute to strengthening higher education capacity in that country? What is its effect on the local community?

As Jason Lane and Kevin Kinser point out in “Over-sight of Internationalization—Who’s Responsible?” external oversight of cross-border education has not prevented some failures of quality; whether it should be strengthened raises the question of the institution’s obligation to be the most important player in ensuring the quality of its own programs.² Additionally, institutions must be: accountable to the many different stakeholders in an international engagement

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or cross-border education; be transparent about goals, policies, and resources; and adhere to policies and practices that promote equality of opportunity for students and staff. Pressure from partner governments, institutions, or organizations (especially if they are funders), the drive to build enrollments or increase revenue, and culture and practices in the partner country may make living by these principles more difficult than when operating in the home context.

These and many other issues were addressed in 2004, well before the 2012 call to action. The International Association of Universities, the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and the American Council on Education (ACE) developed a statement of principles for cross-border education, endorsed by some 30 organizations worldwide. Building on this statement, the four associations in 2007 also created a “Checklist for Good Practice” for higher education across borders.³ The checklist includes a series of

concrete questions that provide a framework for translating principles into action, focusing on whether and how cross-border activities: (1) contribute to the broader public good; (2) build capacity in the host country; (3) provide relevant curriculum and valid credentials in the host country; (4) provide access for students with financial need; (5) ensure high standards and ongoing quality review; (6) provide accountability in the home and host countries; and (7) provide transparent information to public, students, and governments.

To what extent does international engagement create new awareness and critical examination of our assumptions, frameworks, and mindsets?

We are all, to some extent, prisoner of our established mindsets. Just as we agree that cultivating intercultural competence is an important goal in educating students for global citizenship, it should be an equally important capacity for practitioners of international engagement. Like-minded students, faculty, and staff can have difficulty understanding and applying multiple perspectives. Nor are they immune from the danger of assuming that the Western paradigm is better or universally applicable. Without some dislocating experience or point of view, it is natural to be unaware of how very “American” our frame of reference is. Consider the example of education abroad: Our model of study abroad is quite different from that of other countries, if not unique. Most countries use exchanges, rather than third-party providers, or our taken-for-granted faculty-led programs, or programs that essentially replicate the home campus at the study abroad site. We should not be surprised that these very American constructs—rooted in our history, our academic and financial structures—are looked upon with some skepticism by educators abroad. Our expectations for incoming students are radically different: we expect international students to enroll directly in our institutions (preferably for a full degree) but don’t think of this as a model for U.S. students.

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International service learning is a similar case, its roots largely being U.S. study abroad programs. The risks of service abroad are well-known, including paternalism, ethnocentrism, and failure to achieve significant learning about the local context.⁴ As Humphrey Tonkin put it, “its stress on student learning rather than on service to the community” is an unsettling notion.⁵ “It is but one step from [the belief that the study abroad enterprise exists to the liberal education of the student passing through it] to the damaging notion that the larger world exists as a kind of classroom where the American student can learn values or skills that can be transferred to the United States and that student’s adult life.” In a similar vein, development cooperation is always fraught with the danger of exporting practices and concepts that simply do not fit the local circumstance.

Going beyond the culturally embedded framing of internationalization programs and strategies, we can see our mindset at work in the prevailing opinion (at least among educators) that internationalization is always beneficial to students and institutions. This belief is not shared unequivocally by colleagues in other countries, as the results of the IAU Third Global Survey Report showed.⁶ While 11 percent of North American respondents said that they saw no risks to internationalization, only 6 percent of respondents agreed at the global level. Similarly, 18 percent did not reply to the question, compared to 12 percent of all respondents. The risk of brain drain was the top-ranked risk by respondents from Africa (16 percent), Europe (10 percent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (17 percent), but only 6 percent of North American respondents ranked it first (p. 75). Hans de Wit has suggested that although Africa is highly internationalized due the large number of academics educated outside Africa and its imported knowledge and concepts (and, one might add, its colonial legacy), it might need to “go through a process of de-internationalization and liberate itself from these external influences” in order to take its rightful place as an equal player in internationalization.⁷

Thus, the important questions to ask ourselves include: “How do others see us and

our way of doing business? What is their view of a given internationalization activity and how does it relate to their particular needs and situation?” As is the case with student learning, the ability to understand multiple frames and to see ourselves as others see us is no simple matter. An important leadership role of international staff, especially senior international officers, is to help educate faculty and staff who are less experienced in internationalization about this fundamental dimension of working across borders. If U.S. higher education aspires to create graduates who are global citizens, it must embody those principles and model those behaviors on the world stage. **IE**

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ENDNOTES

¹ The statement, “Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call to Action” is online at http://www.iau-aiu.net/sites/all/files/Affirming_Academic_Values_in_Internationalization_of_Higher_Education.pdf.

² Lane, Jason and Kevin Kinser. “Oversight of Internationalization—Who’s Responsible?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 14, 2012.

³ The statement uses Knight’s typology to define “higher education across borders” (often called cross-border higher education), as including moving people (students and faculty), providers (higher education institutions with a physical and/or virtual presence in a host country), programs (courses or programs of instruction), or projects (joint curricula or development projects).

⁴ Sutton, Susan. “Service Learning as Local Learning: The Importance of Context.” Edited by Robert Bringle, Julie Hatcher, and Steven Jones. *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research 1* (2011): 125–144. IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁵ Tonkin, Humphrey. “A Research Agenda for International Service Learning.” Edited by Robert Bringle, Julie Hatcher, and Steven Jones. *International Service Learning: Conceptual Frameworks and Research 1* (2011): 191–224. IUPUI Series on Service Learning Research. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.

⁶ Egron-Polak, Eva and Ross Hudson. *Internationalization of Higher Education: Global Trends: Regional Perspectives*, IAU’s 3rd Global Survey Report. Paris: International Association of Universities, 2010.

⁷ De Wit, Hans. “Reconsidering the Concept of Internationalization.” *International Higher Education*, Number 70, winter 2013, 6–7.

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