

Where the Jobs Are in International Education

By Darlene Bremer



AS THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION has gained more professional status over the last decade or so, the jobs themselves have been evolving. According to David Wick, coordinator of study abroad services for San Francisco State University, there are more jobs available today in the mid- and upper-management levels as professional international educators have gained more experience and as expectations have gotten higher. But it doesn't seem to him that there are more jobs available in any one field. "A couple of years ago, I would have said that there was growth in the number of entry-level jobs for third-party providers of study abroad programs. Recent informal studies, however, indicate that that trend has subsided with the downturn in the economy," he explains.

Not only have the types of jobs in international education been evolving, but the number of academic faculty dedicated to the field has increased, according to Mark Gallovic, director of education aboard in the office of international programs at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington. "Today's jobs can be found in larger offices on college and university campuses, in new positions within particular faculties, in smaller schools which previously had no full-time staff dedicated to international education, in admission offices, development offices, and in research units," he observes. Beyond campuses, jobs can be found with education abroad program providers, international education professional organizations, community programming groups, ESL programs, and many support industries, such as travel agencies, insurance companies, and legal offices. "And there does seem to be more sub-specialization in work areas such as international advising and programming," Gallovic adds.

Where Renee Hahn Burke, program adviser and SEVIS coordinator for the Harvard University-affiliated LASPAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas, has seen the most growth in jobs over

the last few years has been in international program offices and student advising jobs. "Although it's hard to say if any areas or specialties are more in demand than others, it is certain that people who are working with and advising international students in the U.S. need more of a technical background today in order to fully utilize SEVIS databases," she observes.

Stephen K. Appiah-Padi, director, office of international education at Bucknell University, agrees that today there are many student adviser positions available and that most require knowledge of SEVIS regulations. "This has become a requirement as SEVIS has evolved. Today every college or university that takes international students requires student advisers to maintain an international database," he says. Outside of technical expertise, the growth in demand for student advisers comes from universities' expanded international programs. "Although called student advisers, these jobs require, for example, the ability to organize campus activities for international students or to take the lead in broadening the international perspective on campus," Appiah-Padi adds.

Competing for Jobs

So, who's competing for available jobs? In the education abroad specialty, for example, competition for jobs is high at the entry-level, according to Wick. "Universities want people with a lot of education and experience in their programs," he says. At the mid- and upper-levels, Wick says he has noticed an increase in people shifting from one job to another as they seek the best fit for their experience and future plans. "I believe job movement within the middle- and upper-levels is partially in response to changes in institutional priorities in international education."

According to Gallovic, the number of positions at the entry level of international education has grown with the field, but so has the number of applicants and the minimum qualifications they are expected to possess. "I can think of no other profession in which

NAFSA Academy

The NAFSA Academy for International Education provides broad-based training in the field and also allows new professionals to gain more depth in their specific area through a personalized nine-month training program, according to David Wick from San Francisco State University. “For someone in the field for one to three years, the Academy enables them to gain a broader perspective and learn more about the field’s interconnectedness and to develop a deeper understanding of other specialists’ concerns,” he explains. The Academy also works well for professionals whose jobs have changed as their universities’ international education policies and needs have evolved.

In addition to a concentrated, intensive professional development focus, the Academy provides unique networking, coaching, and mentoring opportunities for international education professionals. “The Academy can help professionals advance through training on the most relevant skill sets and enables them to learn the field’s major practice areas while simultaneously allowing them to progress along a personal learning plan,” says Mark Gallovic from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington.

Although Renee Hahn Burke, with LAS-PAU: Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas, has not personally participated in the Academy, she has known others who have and the experience seems to have beneficially exposed them to areas of international education beyond their current field. “The Academy seems to be helpful in promoting the self-evaluation of one’s career and determining the requirements needed to advance in it,” she observes.

people are so willing to freely share ideas, tools, and resource with colleagues, yet is so competitive, particularly at the entry-level,” he observes.

In the area of student advising, Appiah-Padi sees competition for jobs across the board. “In more normal economic times, competition is usually found more at the entry level and upper management positions. For entry-level jobs, there is a misperception that no training is necessary, increasing competition. But sometimes in large universities, upper management positions are described in such a way as to attract only tenured faculty and experienced administrators,” he explains.

Unfortunately, there doesn’t seem to be any way to ascertain whether certain types of institutions or geographic regions in the U.S. are hiring more people in the international education field than others, nor whether there is more activity overseas than in the U.S. “Although the U.S. is probably still in the lead in the number and variety of jobs available in the field of international education,” speculates Appiah-Padi. However, Wick has observed that with the changes in European education policies, there’s been an increase in exchange programs, creating a growing need for international education specialists. “I believe there’s also been some growth in partner professional organizations in other parts of the world, as well as more overseas opportunities for practiced administrators to work in the field,” Wick states.

Moving Up

To prepare to move up in the field of international education, professionals need to have international and job experience, as well as an advanced degree, according to Wick. “I’ve observed that candidates with a bachelor’s degree can go only so far and even candidates with master’s degrees, but little practical experience, can get stuck,” he observes.

Burke also appreciates the value of graduate work when attempting to move up in the field. “Graduate work can enable people to become stronger candidates for higher level positions. For top management jobs in international offices and universities or in education abroad programs, you probably want to consider a doctoral degree, which

is required for many top positions,” she says.

However, according to Gallovic, the field has actually evolved to develop a generation that has adopted a focus on developing practical experience and professional development outside of degree programs. “Thus the debate will continue about the value of advanced degrees for mid- and upper-level jobs,” he notes.

When looking to move up in the field, according to Elisabeth Foster, international student adviser at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, it’s important to build networks within the field and within academia. She advises to attend conferences, join associations or social networking groups associated with the field, and to seek out helpful people. “Try to gain knowledge and skills in your current position that can be applied to future jobs and demonstrate at least a little understanding of how all facets of the field work,” she adds.

Appiah-Padi adds a second or third language to the skills required for advancement. He believes languages are especially important because they help the adviser to connect with more foreign students. Even when advising U.S. students who are going abroad, the international education professional needs to deal with staff and advisers at the overseas destination. “The ability to communicate in other languages makes the adviser more effective in the job,” he says.



How Does Grad School Fit In?

Determining whether attending graduate school will boost one's career in international education and what advanced degree to apply for is, according to most, strictly based on individual needs. "In deciding whether to attend graduate school or not, international education professionals need to determine what their personal career goals are first. However, it should be noted that, as these are mostly campus-based jobs, having a bachelor's degree alone can limit individual advancement," says Wick.

Although Foster agrees that the decision to attend graduate school should be based

on applicable career goals, it can be helpful to research positions to see what employers are requiring in terms of academic credentials. "If an employer posts a position that states a master's degree is required or preferred, the individual must decide if their experience holds enough weight for that position, or whether they will be at a disadvantage against other applicants with the degree," she explains.

Once the decision to attend graduate school has been made, the international education professional has to determine what kind of degree to apply for. "Graduate degrees are valuable throughout the entire field and are a requirement for most mid-level positions, while doctorates are still commonly

expected for upper management levels," observes Gallovic. Besides whether one's career goals require a graduate degree, other factors to take into account are interest, time, and resources. "At one time, an undergraduate degree differentiated the applicant. Now, more positions require a minimum of a Master's degree to be considered," adds Burke.

The next decision is whether to attend graduate school full-time or part-time while working. "Well, that depends on how much of a hurry you're in," says Wick. If one can work in the program that one is attending graduate school for, then that person can gain their education and experience at the same time. Plus, some of the intersections between graduate work and one's current job can be valuable and interesting. "However, going part-time while working can limit some of the programs that are available to the student," he observes. Not only that, but it is very challenging and can be grueling, according to Burke. "I got my master's while working full-time and I know that you have to carefully consider not only how well you think you can handle the work load with the job, but finances and what areas of life you think you can compromise or put on hold to do both."

Generally, no one believes that an advanced degree is more or less valuable in today's economic downturn. However, if more people are applying for the same position, then an advanced degree can easily become an advantage. "The state of today's economy means that there are more people with the appropriate credentials competing for available jobs," agrees Wick.

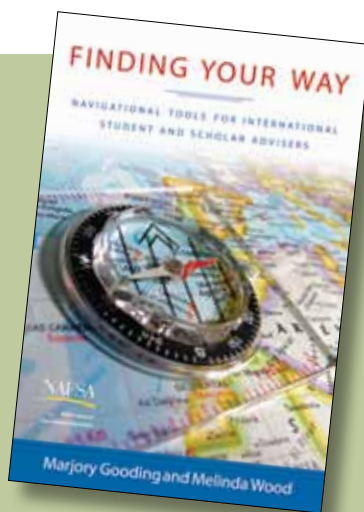
Regardless of the state of the economy, Appiah-Padi regards an advanced degree to be valuable in helping a person explore different options. "In the desire to internationalize U.S. campuses, graduate level training for performing research and analyzing data can help the international education professional spearhead specific programs and develop policy," he says. **IE**

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