

SENDING STUDENTS ABROAD, hosting international students and scholars, and collaborating with international research partners are part and parcel of the day-to-day activities of the twenty-first century university. These activities are often based on the connections and relationships of individual faculty members, departments, and research centers—nowadays, these facilitation tasks for comprehensive internationalization increasingly fall to the senior international officer (SIO), which is becoming a role of growing importance on many U.S. campuses.

On some campuses, the role of the SIO may be new or have only a relatively limited history to draw upon. But even where it is well established, many new SIOs find themselves in uncharted waters trying to navigate what to do first and how to get their message across to all of the university stakeholders. Additionally, many new SIOs come from the faculty side of an institution while others come from the international student advising arena, the international student affairs area, or education abroad office, or even, occasionally, from outside the institution. If you are a new or aspiring SIO, advice from seasoned SIOs can help you hit the ground running when the opportunity to lead the institution in internationalization arises.

New senior international officers must build consensus to help all the pieces fall into place for comprehensive internationalization.

Gain a Big-picture Perspective

Although the exact mission of the position looks different at each institution, many SIOs are tasked with coordinating international activities across the entire institution through global affairs offices. Their portfolio can include study abroad, international student services, international research and teaching, faculty exchange, global studies, and much more. New SIOs need to gain a birds' eye view of the institution as a whole.

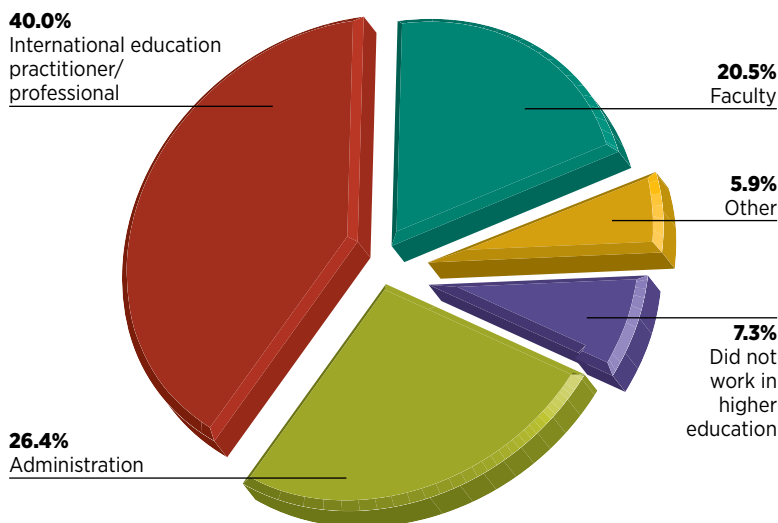
“When you make the transition to being an SIO, I think it is vital for you to expand your viewpoint...faculty need to begin to see things from the perspective of staff, and staff need to begin to see things from the perspective of the faculty,” says Susan Buck Sutton, senior adviser for international initiatives in the Office of the President at Bryn Mawr College. “Above all, you need to begin thinking in an institution-wide manner and to understand that both sides are essential to successful internationalization. Neither side has a monopoly on this, and each is enhanced by understanding the other. Phrased another way, it is essential to develop a ‘big picture’ view of both the institution and internationalization.”

Having an institution-wide perspective allows SIOs to “look for opportunities where we can make a significant, differentiated impact,” adds Suresh V. Garimella, chief global affairs officer at Purdue University.



Varied Backgrounds

60 percent of SIOs came to the position from outside the international education profession.



Data taken from a 2013 survey of senior international officers that included responses from 230 individuals. The survey was conducted by Stratton Publishing & Marketing for NAFSA.



You're the SIO—Now What?

- Gain an understanding of the institutional culture
- Build relationships with key players on campus before implementing organizational changes
- Create transparent decision-making processes
- Educate deans and faculty about the role of the international affairs office
- Become adept at defining how the activities and interests of individual faculty, departments, and colleges align with internationalization efforts

**Tips provided by senior international officers interviewed for this article.*

The big picture also requires viewing the institution from an academic, financial, and administrative perspective. This can be a challenge, especially for SIOs coming from a faculty background.

“One of the reasons faculty members become faculty members is because they don’t want to be in business. As we are painfully reminded, universities are very large businesses. You have to shift to a mindset that this is both a place of learning and a place of business,” says Jeffrey Riedinger, an experienced SIO who held his first SIO position at Michigan State University (MSU) and recently joined University of Washington (UW) as the vice provost of global affairs. For him, an additional challenge of coming from a faculty background was familiarizing himself with the administrative policies and procedures that the university has to operate by: “Part of the challenge is becoming familiar with administrative policies so you can move away from the position where it looks like all you are doing is raising barriers.”

He adds that one of the other things a new SIO needs to do is get a handle on is the breadth and depth of international research, international education opportunities, and study abroad. To do this, Riedinger takes meetings with “anyone and everyone who wants to see me.”

Meet Everybody You Can

James Holloway, who was appointed vice provost for global and engaged education at University of Michigan in May 2013, concurs.

“It takes time to learn how to operate at the university level, especially at a very large decentralized institution. There are many stakeholders, with differing needs that are sometimes imperfectly aligned. The solution is simple: meet everybody you can, understand and appreciate what they do, discover its importance and legitimacy, and bring the right folks together to smooth out the friction points,” he says.

William Brustein, currently vice provost for global strategies and international affairs at The Ohio State University (OSU), has been a SIO for more than a decade. He says that much of the same advice for anyone going into senior management is relevant to starting as an SIO: “You need to understand the greater politics of the university and make sure you navigate the path in such a way that you don’t get on the wrong side.”

Brustein’s strategy for breaking into the SIO role at a new institution is to set up meetings with the deans of each college. Not only does he try to understand their goals for internationalizing their colleges, he also tries to help them understand the role of the global affairs office on campus. “I explain our international

goals and strategies and familiarize them with the services that we can provide them,” he says.

“You need to build relationships and partnerships. Making the rounds is important for an SIO. You need to understand how to address the interest of those with whom you’re talking,” Brustein adds.

By understanding what is important to deans and faculty, SIOs can do their job by helping the deans and faculty do theirs. “Your job is to enable the deans to do their job by providing the structures and systems,” says Lorna Jean Edmonds, vice provost for global affairs at Ohio University.

Riedinger agrees: “The role is much more about service, understanding the interests and passions of faculty and students, and figuring out how you can remove barriers and facilitate conversations around global themes.”

Garimella agrees that having a strong working relationship with deans and faculty is essential to the SIO position. “It is also important, in my mind, that the SIO has the respect and cooperation of deans and faculty. Without their support and participation, there can be no successful university-driven efforts,” he says.

To do this, he suggests finding ways to stay connected to faculty, staff and students, and at the same time, keep department heads and deans informed about global initiatives. “We must coordinate...but not control. Our goal should be one of facilitators, not owners,” he adds.

Not Everyone Is Paid to Think About the Entire University

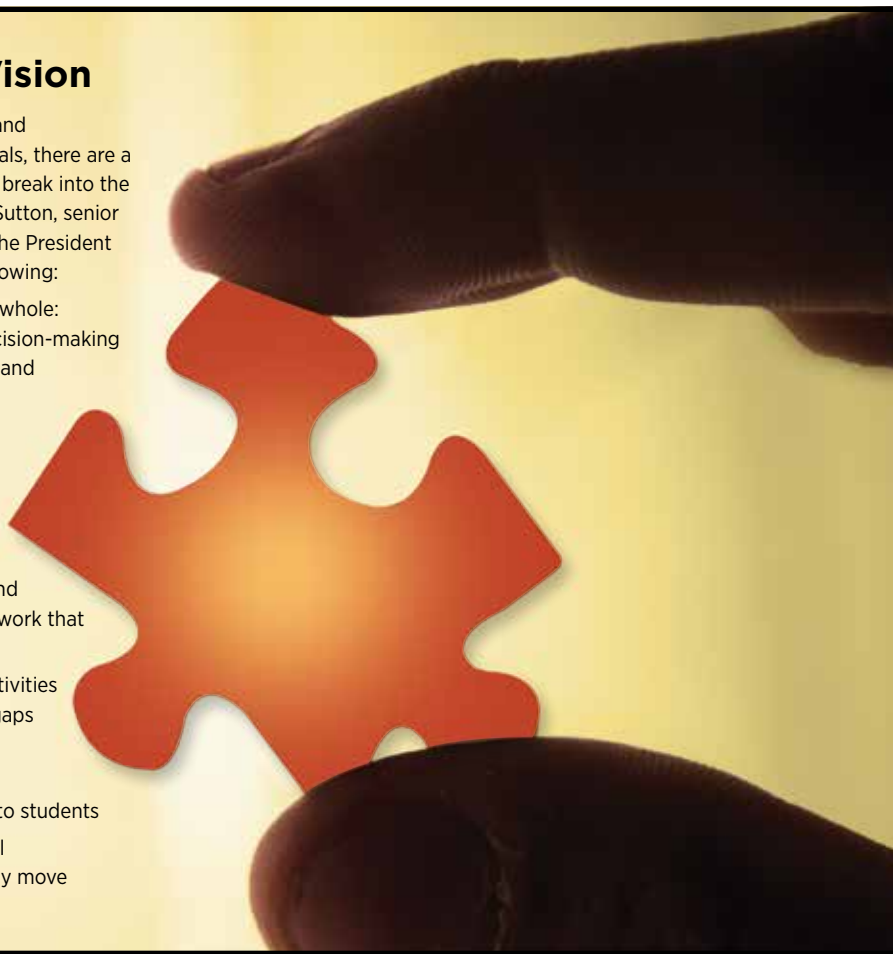
Veteran SIOs say that getting to know the stakeholders on campus can also help new SIOs identify alignment between international activities at various levels of the institution. Furthermore, understanding the needs and interests of various actors on campus helps SIOs explain how the activities of individual researchers or departments fit into larger internationalization processes. It’s also equally important to understand that not everyone on campus is required to have a global perspective, according to Riedinger.

“Faculty members aren’t paid to think about the entire university. Department chairs and deans are paid to be zealous advocates of their departments. As SIO, you’re paid to think about how to stitch that

Developing a Strategic Vision

As senior managers tasked with leading, planning and coordinating an institution’s internationalization goals, there are a number of steps that new SIOs should take as they break into the role at a new institution. According to Susan Buck Sutton, senior adviser for international initiatives in the Office of the President at Bryn Mawr College, new SIOs need to do the following:

- Develop an understanding of the institution as a whole: its mission, strategic goals, key players, basic decision-making processes, financial structures, constituent units, and where internationalization fits in the broader institutional picture
- Clarify the role he or she is being asked to play, how the SIO position is being defined, what decisions fall to the SIO, with whom the SIO must communicate
- Get to know the staff in his or her office and spend time talking about the goals and purpose of the work that is being done in the office
- Take stock of the broad range of international activities across the institution, identifying strengths and gaps
- Get to know as many individuals outside the international office as possible, from upper-level administrators to faculty to staff in other offices to students
- Develop an organizational structure for pulling all relevant constituencies together to collaboratively move internationalization forward.



Many Hats

SIOs have a wide array of responsibilities and often touch a myriad of areas across the entire campus.



Data taken from a 2013 survey of senior international officers that included responses from 230 individuals. The survey was conducted by Stratton Publishing & Marketing for NAFSA.

together. A key part of being successful in the role is just understanding that certain people are paid to deliver things that don't require an institution-wide perspective. Rather than beating them up for that, figure out how to show them where their work might fit into the bigger picture," Riedinger advises.

"Altruism will only get you so far. To make your programs move forward, you need to be able to get access to resources. You have to speak to those who have resources and explain how what you are doing speaks to their interest. You have to be entrepreneurial both internally and externally," Brustein adds.

"If you want to get people's buy-in, you need to speak to their self-interest. Furthermore, if you want to be creative and develop college-wide programs, you have to be sensitive to people's turf. For example, I was trying to create a global studies program and all of a sudden there seemed to be resistance from some of the area studies centers. I had to make the argument that this would bring more students to the fold for them," he says.

To help get everyone on the same page, new SIOs therefore "need to demonstrate a commitment to creating mutual benefit for the institution and the individual," according to David Pilsbury, pro-vice-chancellor for international development at Coventry University in the United Kingdom.

When the International Experience and Mobility Unit was created at CU, he simultaneously launched a staff mobility program. "We now send out more students than any other UK university, and we are one of the largest recruiters of international students. When you add to this specific program to foster staff mobility, we have a tremendous pool of international knowledge and views that we use in the classroom to enrich the student experience. Staff are provided with opportunities to develop their teaching and research with the benefit of the different perspectives that exposure to international colleagues allows," Pilsbury explains.

Develop a Unique Constellation of Skills

New SIOs also have to create structures and facilitate conversations that might not otherwise fit with the traditional institutional ways of doing things. Pilsbury argues that to do this, SIOs need to be willing to wear a variety of hats: "As international activities are cross cutting, and growing, often rapidly, they are bringing new challenges and opportunities that don't always fit with existing structures and ways of working so the SIO has to be cheerleader, venture capitalist, negotiator, architect, planner and influencer," he said.

Brustein concurs: "You have to be a jack of all trades. You have to understand scholarship, be a good salesperson, be a good fund raiser, and be a good ambassador. The constellation of skills is somewhat unique. I don't think that anyone goes into it with all of those skills."

Brustein suggests that new SIOs find mentors and advisers both on and off-campus to help develop the full range of necessary skills, as well as navigate the institutional landscape. To connect with colleagues at other institutions, new SIOs can attend various conferences where SIOs tend to gather, such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators' annual conference.

Likewise, on-campus mentors can help new SIOs identify potential opportunities and avoid potential minefields. Brustein says that he actively establishes international advisory committees with faculty and staff representing the entire university. "They come up with policy recommendations and share best practices," he explains, adding that the group members also become ambassadors throughout the entire university.

At Ohio University, Edmonds similarly has access to an advisory group of a dozen senior colleagues who can help her develop strategies to mobilize her interests. She has started to build a group of people with similar ideas who serve as a sounding board.

To help facilitate conversations with deans and faculty, Edmonds also suggests asking questions rather than issuing directives. “You can see how people will respond, and start building a group of people with similar ideas. I’m very thoughtful about broaching the things I’m interested in to see if there is any pick up. If there isn’t, I need to understand why not,” she says.

Riedinger takes a similar approach. He suggests framing conversations in way that doesn’t turn into a “zero-sum war over resources.” Outline the criteria by which decisions are made about strategic priorities and build consensus around those. If the decision-making process is transparent and objective, there will be less push back or turf wars, he says.

At the same time the SIO position requires a big-picture perspective, veteran SIOs caution that it’s equally important to be realistic. “I think you need to be thoughtful and analytical in terms of what it is that you want to accomplish,” Edmonds says.

Pilsbury agrees that vision is important, but it needs to be achievable. “You clearly need to have an ambitious agenda. Otherwise, why bother? But it needs to be achievable. If internationalization is to be embedded and sustained it has to be based on real value added, not grand statements and pipe dreams,” he elaborates.

Riedinger notes that new SIOs should identify both long-term and short-term goals: “Everything takes time. Be realistic about when things will be accomplished. It’s important to have a 10–20 year plan but also six-month milestones.”

He adds that new SIOs should “take advantage of what low-hanging fruit there is, find armies of the willing, and build success stories.” He suggests seeking out departments or majors that have already demonstrated a commitment to internationalizing their curriculum by requiring study abroad or language study. “The conversation regarding identifying specific global competencies associated with a broader array of liberal learning outcomes for the university’s students is easier to launch with these campus units,” he says.

He also advises looking for allies outside of the arts, humanities, and social sciences to help get science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines on board. “It was far easier to work with the department and create success stories we could share with other units in the natural sciences, than to launch a full frontal assault on all natural science departments at once,” Riedinger says. **IE**

CHARLOTTE WEST is a freelance writer in Seattle, Washington. Her last article for *IE* was “Don’t be Socially Awkward!” in the September/October 2013 issue, which covered managing institutional social media risks.



SIO Success Story

“In this position, you can play a role in creating programs that enable students and faculty across the entire university to have these (international) experiences,” says William Brustein, currently vice provost for global strategies and international affairs at The Ohio State University (OSU). He previously held similar positions at University of Pittsburgh and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

An example of a university-wide initiative that Brustein has implemented as SIO at OSU is the Global Option program, which identifies five global competencies that every student should master to be able to work and operate in a global environment. It entails a study abroad component, internationally focused coursework, an e-portfolio, a language requirement, and a capstone project. Brustein and his team piloted the program with three colleges: engineering, public health, and social work. After a successful pilot program, all departments can now elect to offer the global option within their majors. Brustein’s office works with the department to tailor the program to suit their needs. “We do not pursue a one-size-fits-all strategy with the global option. We work with each department to help them design their own global option as long as they are designed to fulfill the five global competencies identified as essential for all graduates of our university,” he explains.