



Improving International Students' Experience

An interview with Chris Glass

CHRIS R. GLASS is an assistant professor of higher education at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Glass is a lead researcher on the Global Perspective Inventory (GPI), a widely used assessment instrument that examines the relationship between educational experiences and global learning outcomes. Glass is the recipient of the 2016 Innovative Research in International Education Award from NAFSA's Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship Knowledge Community.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

"Insights," which is a short interview with an individual about how international education has influenced them or shares a unique perspective of the profession.

IE: You are a co-author of *International Student Engagement: Strategies for Creating Inclusive, Connected and Purposeful Campus Environments*. How can higher education institutions better engage international students on campus?

GLASS: High-impact practices (e.g., first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, undergraduate research, and capstone experiences) are ideal opportunities to better engage international students on campus. They are ideal because they are built into the curriculum and required, whereas most international and intercultural programs are elective. The key is to recognize what makes a high-impact practice "high-impact." High-impact practices involve a significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning, and interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters. There is a strong research base that demonstrates that international students who participate in experiences with these characteristics are more likely to form social relationships with peers from other cultures, more likely to report a greater sense of belonging, and more likely to interact with faculty outside-of-class.

IE: How can higher education institutions improve international students' experiences on their campuses?

GLASS: I have just one suggestion, actually: Embrace assessment. This one suggestion, if done well, generates creative solutions to difficult problems. I could provide a list of "smart practices," but my experience tells me that no strategy unequivocally improves the international student experience. However, I can point to countless examples where dedicated professionals have developed creative solutions once a good assessment process is in place.

Some campuses engage in ongoing conversations about improvement; others treat assessment as a dreaded once-a-year ritual. The difference between campuses with high

and low levels of international student satisfaction is not necessarily the programs they offer, but how they learn about their work. Campuses that engage in assessment as an iterative, ongoing process involve international students from start to finish. International students do not just "complete assessments"—they may help collect data, interpret it, and formulate action plans alongside administrators, faculty, and staff. An effective assessment process also teases out differences in the international student experience by country of origin, language proficiency, and socioeconomic characteristics and then develops targeted strategies to address the needs of different international student segments.

IE: How can professionals in international education help increase their institutions' commitment to international students?

GLASS: According to my research, the top three things that matter in terms of increasing an institution's commitment to internationalization are: retention of senior leadership, support from senior administration, and communication with faculty. The same strategies apply to increasing an institution's commitment to international students. To build commitment, institutions must think long and hard, not just about the programs and services they provide, but also about how they are organized. If the institution's organization is fragmented, the international student experience is likely fragmented. If international admissions, intercultural programs, visa services, and advising are soiled and uncoordinated, chances are the international student experience is isolated and inconsistent. The longevity of international educators, strong relationships among senior leaders, and good communication with faculty are the building blocks of an organization committed to international students. **IE**

ELAINA LOVELAND is the editor-in-chief of *International Educator (IE)* magazine.