

THE INNOVATION IMPERATIVE: Leading Change in a Competitive Environment

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2015 SYMPOSIUM ON LEADERSHIP
NAFSA 2015 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPO • MAY 26, 2015 • BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

NAFSA
Association of
International Educators

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Released 2015

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NAFSA's 2015 Symposium on Leadership, *The Innovation Imperative: Leading Change in a Competitive Environment*, was held at the 2015 Annual Conference & Expo on Tuesday, May 26, in Boston, Massachusetts. The aim of the symposium was to guide senior international officers (SIOs) through the latest developments in international higher education with a focus on the ways in which institutions—and senior leaders—need to be entrepreneurial and innovative in the face of the challenges of twenty-first-century education. Over 160 international education leaders—more than 20 percent from outside the United States—gathered to hear speakers provide an overview of the changing nature of higher education as well as to showcase new frameworks that support internationalization efforts.

The keynote speaker was **Abraham Varghese**, CEO India of Academic Partnerships, LLC and former assistant provost for globalization at the University of Miami, Florida. Varghese's presentation was followed by a panel discussion, "Institutional Innovation: Voices from the Field," featuring **Ann Buller**, president of Centennial College and past chair of the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE); **Richard Nader**, vice provost for international affairs at the University of North Texas (UNT); and **Erich Dietrich**, associate dean for global and academic programs at New York University's (NYU) Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development and NYU's assistant vice president of global programs. They shared how they have strategized within their own institutional contexts to support innovation toward campus internationalization.

The final panel, "Individual Competencies: International Education Leadership and Change Management," featured **Lucy Aphthorp Leske**, managing partner at Witt/Kieffer in the United States; **Stephen Connelly**, director at GlobalEd Services in Australia; and **Kate Jennings**, international education consultant from Canada. They explored perspectives on leadership based on different country contexts related to the individual qualifications and competencies that SIOs need to successfully lead campus internationalization.

Seismic Shifts in Global Higher Education

Varghese presented an overview of the ways in which the higher education landscape has changed in recent years. Teaching and learning have changed, online education is invading campuses, and the global economy is more dependent than ever on higher education—and vice versa.

"International education is available in the most remote circumstances of the world," he said. "Everywhere you can think of, there is a demand for higher education."



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According to Varghese, there is a growing global market for higher education, mostly outside of the United States, driven by the growth of the middle class in developing countries.¹

Varghese said that the demand isn't just for a college degree, however. The real demand is for educational training that provides skills to help graduates find employment.

“Students need to be ably trained. Just a degree on your wall is not going to get you a job,” he said.

This could be a win-win situation—albeit with some challenges. Students need education, and educational institutions need students. As Varghese pointed out, one-third of U.S. universities are under financial strain with higher operating costs than revenues and are increasingly relying on revenue from international tuition.²

Varghese challenged SIOs to look beyond their campuses to the private sector for inspiration, especially in regard to online education. Online education, he said, is trying to solve two problems: the cost of higher education and access to higher education, especially in countries with geographically isolated communities.

“What is your plan to capitalize on the technology opportunity? Are you going to compete, or stay on the sidelines?” he asked.

He argued that SIOs need to keep abreast of the latest technological developments, understand them, and apply online opportunities to their institution's educational needs. There are several ways to do this. The first is to hire staff with extensive experience in online higher education. However, the expertise need not

“How does your international work fall under the banner of your institutional mission?”

be in-house. Another option is to outsource non-academic services of online education, such as the technology platforms used to deliver online classes.

“There are plenty of good online education providers who universities can and should discuss their online needs with. Many of these companies partner on a ‘success model.’ This facilitates the universities to venture out with minimal cost and risk. The revenues generated need to be shared only after these programs are successful,” Varghese said.

He also argued that institutions need to be more entrepreneurial and “practice what they preach” in business schools. He said that institutions have quality educational offerings that are only available to a few students, or only available through a traditional four-year degree.

“Many universities have excellent courses and degrees that they are not capitalizing upon ... This is a unique phenomenon in higher education. Imagine some of the global product brands reaching only a few hundred customers per year!”

“Universities should take the initiative and contact the companies that have the venture capital to

work out ideas. Most are open to these conversations, assuming good value propositions are brought forth for consideration.”

He also suggested that universities consider innovative models for partnership. They might work with a local partner who is interested in particular courses or access to faculty with particular areas of expertise to supplement their own educational offerings. As an example, the University of Texas (UT)-Arlington provides curriculum to Fore School of Management in New Delhi, India, via technology and support services provided by Academic Partnerships, LLC. Students are able to earn specializations in topics such as supply chain management, human resource management, and risk management by taking online courses taught by UT faculty through a cloud-based, on-demand delivery system. Quality control is maintained through the learning management system and intellectual property is protected through legal contracts.

Voices from the Field

Ann Buller has made global citizenship a hallmark of her tenure as president of Centennial College in Toronto, Canada. She sees innovation and engaging the world at large as an imperative for higher education institutions. Furthermore, she believes innovation should be linked to institutional mission. “How does your international work fall under the banner of your institutional mission?” she asked.

She has made some radical changes to learning on her campus since she became president in 2004. “We redefined our educational mission by blowing up the conception of what a college is. If it killed me, I was going to teach you about yourself and the world around you,” she said.

A major component of her internationalization efforts was the introduction of a global citizenship class for all students, regardless of field. In 2009, Centennial College launched Global Citizenship &





Equity Learning Experiences (GCELEs)³ to encourage student participation in applied social justice learning environments by providing opportunities that develop leadership skills and work to create positive social change through service-learning projects. The GCELEs, along with other initiatives, are funded through an international education fee of \$17, which is paid by all students.

While Buller focused on student learning, other institutional representatives talked about the importance of building research collaboration not only between countries but also across disciplines. “Energy, water, you name it—most contemporary research topics require global collaboration,” UNT’s Richard Nader said.

He emphasized that the speed of data and computer networking has also propelled research collaboration. Despite the shift in faculty research priorities, U.S. institutions largely remain domestically focused, partly because faculty do not always know where to find support for international research collaboration on campus.

It is there that he sees a role for SIOs to play. The international office can step in and help bring

together actors with different areas of expertise, as well as create stronger linkages between education abroad and research. “We wanted to raise our institution’s global research IQ. We did this through creating country engagement groups and reorienting study abroad to encompass support for research abroad,” Nader said.

A concrete example at UNT is a grant proposal for undergraduate research that was strong in computer science but lacked a necessary culture and language component. The UNT international office helped that project to find another set of faculty on campus, previously unknown to the computer science department, who had developed another research project funded by the National Science Foundation focusing on research ethics in an international context. The campus collaboration provided the necessary cultural expertise to make the proposal competitive.

Nader suggests that SIOs and international offices more generally can employ a “mix-it-up strategy” by convening country interest groups. “Through that process, (you can) find a broad mix of interdisciplinary, namely humanities and STEM global faculty, with complementary interests. If you combine that

**“Technology is changing the delivery of education,
but it’s not changing what education is.”**

with resource opportunities, or specific grants that require interdisciplinary collaboration, new teams and relationships can be built. Most of the time, it is not ‘on purpose’ that these different sets of faculty ignore the other, and frequently it is easier to approach the STEM folks in helping them discover the value of social sciences and cross-cultural that strengthens their otherwise technically sound proposals,” Nader said.



He also proposes catalytic funding at the institutional level. “Through seed funds (local intramural funding), the international office and research office have leverage to build meetings with study abroad, immigration, or risk management to improve campus support infrastructure for faculty desiring to conduct research overseas,” Nader explained.

At UNT, they have done this through the Incentives for Global Research Opportunities (I-GRO), which was created to promote high-quality, mutually beneficial global research collaborations.⁴

Similarly, Erich Dietrich at NYU sees one of the roles of SIOs as “trying to find patterns and putting

the pieces of the puzzle together creatively. I will not always know the best of what’s happening at the forefront of any particular academic field, but I might be able to put them together in a new, creative way.”

NYU, for example, has a network of international centers around the world that host undergraduate study abroad and faculty and graduate student research. When NYU’s Steinhardt School was re-vamping its undergraduate honors program in 2012, Dietrich suggested that they could enhance the program by collaborating with the international centers.

The result was the creation of the Dean’s Global Honors Seminars,⁵ which allow first-year students to do an honors seminar with faculty. Students participate in a semester-long course in New York and then travel to an international center for a week in January or over spring break. These courses include topics such as food, culture and globalization, human rights, and nutrition and sustainability.

Dietrich said that as a result of bringing the international centers together with the honors program, NYU was able to do something different than other institutions. In addition, students who participate in the week-long trip to an international center are more likely to do a longer study abroad and also have better retention.

Dietrich also advocated for a very intentional and proactive approach in creating international partnerships. “A lot of universities want to have partnerships, but you need to go back to your strategic goals and think about what you want to achieve with any given agreement or partnership that you engage in,” he said.

Dietrich has also seen many of the trends Varghese identified at NYU. However, he doesn’t believe that online education will totally replace the traditional classroom.

He has seen more of a move toward what he calls “deeply hybrid classes,” which provide face-to-face

interaction, a rich multimedia environment, and interaction with international peers via technology.⁶

“Technology is changing the delivery of education, but it’s not changing what education is,” he said.

Individual Competencies: International Education Leadership and Change Management

The event wrapped up with a discussion of the ways in which SIOs can enhance their own professional skills and competencies in order to address the challenges outlined by Varghese and the other speakers. “We are seeing a trend where colleges and universities are moving away from being places where leaders manage intellectual pursuits and endeavors to places where they are really managing institutional and societal challenges,” said Lucy Apthorp Leske.

Steven Connelly suggested that SIOs focus on developing intercultural communication and interpersonal skills and take advantage of peer mentoring and shadowing both for themselves and their staff.

Kate Jennings likewise described the skills necessary for success in international education

leadership. “The role taps into the need to be a good broker in terms of politics and connections, but also someone who has a handle on the technical aspects of curriculum development and really understands what it is that we are delivering. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and we are responding to these changes in very different contexts. The question to ask is: ‘How does it apply to me as an individual in terms of **competencies**?’ You need to make sure you are at the forefront of change,” she said.

ENDNOTES:

1. According to *The New York Times*, opportunities abound in countries such as India, where 600 million people—65 percent of the population—is under the age of 25. See http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/18/opinion/indias-youth-challenge.html?_r=0 for more information.
2. See <http://www.bain.com/publications/articles/financially-sustainable-university.aspx>.
3. See <https://www.centennialcollege.ca/about-centennial/college-overview/signature-learning-experience/global-citizenship-and-equity-learning-experiences/> for more information.
4. See <https://international.unt.edu/IGRO> for more information.
5. See http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/global/undergraduate/deans_global_honors_seminar for more information.
6. For an example, see [Where the City Meets the Sea](#) on the NYU website.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The NAFSA 2015 Symposium on Leadership, *The Innovation Imperative: Leading Change in a Competitive Environment*, was organized by the International Education Leadership Knowledge Community (IEL KC), and chaired by Sonja Knutson, director of the International Centre and special adviser to the president on international affairs at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. Barry Morris, institutional strategy and international education consultant, vice chair of the board of directors of the Georgia Council of International Visitors, and NAFSA board member, moderated the panel discussion with Richard Nader, Ann Buller,

and Erich Dietrich. NAFSA would like to acknowledge IEL KC Chair-elect Dlynn Williams, head of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at the University of North Georgia, and current IEL KC Chair Rahul Choudaha, chief knowledge officer and senior director of strategic development at World Education Services, for their contributions to the Symposium on Leadership. NAFSA would also like to thank Northeastern University, represented by Patrick Plunkett, senior associate dean for global engagement and executive director for Northeastern University Global, for its generous support for the symposium.