

THE BIG PICTURE

Conversations with experts in the field of international education

In three separate interviews, experts in the field share with NAFSA their view of where things are headed in the field of global higher education, what challenges international educators may face in the coming decade, and how campus leaders and faculty can react to those challenges—and collaborate across the field—in an effort to facilitate more authentic and transformational learning.

- Kris Olds, NAFSA Senior Fellow for Internationalization and professor of geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, talks about varying perspectives in education research, strategies for promoting internationalization, and current trends in global higher education.
- Gavin Sanderson, deputy director of academic learning services at the University of South Australia, discusses methods for understanding cultural differences in the classroom and how to prepare faculty to see their courses and campuses from a more global perspective.
- Josef Mestenhauser, professor emeritus in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development, delves into critical issues facing practitioners in the field today, including what aspects of international education might benefit from new research.

About NAFSA

NAFSA is an association of individuals worldwide advancing international education and exchange and global workforce development. NAFSA serves international educators and their institutions and organizations by establishing principles of good practice, providing training and professional development opportunities, providing networking opportunities, and advocating for international education.

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Mapping Out an International Perspective

A Conversation with Kris Olds, PhD

Submitted by Bryan McAllister-Grande

This Q&A is taken from conversation at the NAFSA 2010 Annual Conference & Expo in Kansas City, MO, with Kris Olds. Olds, a NAFSA Senior Fellow for Internationalization, is professor of geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His wide range of research and writing interests includes the globalization of higher education, regionalism and interregionalism, and urban change. He plays a variety of service roles at UW-Madison related to internationalization and curriculum development. The title of Olds' seminar was "Global Regionalisms and Higher Education."

NAFSA: *Your academic training is in geography. What sparked your focus on education, specifically international education, as part of your work as a geographer?*

Olds: I was not initially interested in formal research on education. I was more interested in organizations and how they differ across countries and cultures. I did an undergraduate and master's degree at the University of British Columbia-Vancouver, and then went to England on a [Commonwealth Scholarship](#) and got a PhD at Bristol, then received my post-doc back in Canada. After spending another year in England, I went to Singapore for 4 years. Part of my background, then, is the fact that I rotated among all these different institutions and different countries realizing there's a fair bit of variation in how people view education and what the missions of the universities are and how they're governed.

My PhD work was on the globalization of the services industries and urban development. I was looking at the role of elite global architects and their involvement in planning new city center mega-projects. So I was looking at an elite segment of this industry and how it works and operates, and how in some ways, their world meshed with, contradicted, or coincided with the government's development agenda at the urban scale. While I was working in Singapore, I drove my son to an international school. That's when I first saw the new campus of [INSEAD](#) business school being built. I lived in Singapore from 1997–2001, just when the Asian economic crisis hit. The landscape in Asia suddenly changed—all these foreign branch universities like INSEAD were being established. That's when I started to get interested, because before I hadn't really thought about education as a services industry until I started tracking what was going on in Singapore and what the government was doing. I was looking at Singapore's global city development strategy, and I realized, "ah-ha"—education *is* a services industry, but it's different from something like architecture, obviously.

I thought at first researching education was going to be easy, because I thought I was already "in" it. But the more you learn about it, the more you realize what you don't know.

NAFSA: *I imagine it's hard to research higher education when you're already positioned it, to get a sense of the big picture.*

Olds: Yes, I started to do some background reading and I thought naively all of the research on global higher education would come from capital "E" Education, that is, schools of education. But then I

realized it doesn't. I talked with colleagues who advised me that the best research on education often comes from sociology, political science, or other social science fields.

NAFSA: *NAFSA itself has historically focused on the exchange of students and scholars and the profession of exchange. For a long time, the professionals dealing with outgoing students (study abroad) and those dealing with incoming students (international student services) weren't always connected. In the last few years NAFSA has moved more in the direction of comprehensive internationalization—that is, all of the things institutions are doing to internationalize—campuses, curricula, strategies, etc. Given what you presented in your seminar, how does your work on global higher education relate to internationalization planning now being formed?*

Olds: It relates [to internationalization planning] on a number of levels. On one level, it provides a framework for leaders to create policies, programs, specific projects, and initiatives that will re-shape the flow of students. A lot of what is going on in global higher education is about governing this mobility—everything from degree recognition, to thinking about quality assurance, to making financial decisions about research investment. So the globalization of higher education sets the frameworks, shapes institutional missions, and informs how policies are made.

It's important to be aware of what's going on. And if institutional leaders have insights into what works or what doesn't—pros and cons—it's important to share that. If NAFSAns are the ones on the ground, getting their "boots dirty," so to speak, in some ways they know best what is going on. It's important to publicize that feedback or criticism, so we can engage in wider debates as much as possible.

The problem I see is that the people who are setting the larger frameworks—governments, institutions, NGOs, etc.—don't always know what is happening on the ground. They don't have a good sense of what works and what doesn't, or what is feasible. And this is where NAFSA and NAFSAns might play an integral role in shaping the global higher education landscape. NAFSAns should be involved in these debates.

NAFSA: *Do we as NAFSA members have a certain responsibility, a certain ethical responsibility perhaps, to know what is going on in global higher education? Should we be thinking more about this responsibility when planning our internationalization strategies? For instance, global mobility and the movement of institutions from one location to another could in fact exacerbate inequalities rather than improve them.*

Olds: I would say so. A few months [before NAFSA's 2010 Annual Conference], I went to a meeting in Mexico of the [International Association of Universities](#) (IAU). At some conferences such as these, there is concern that there are growing tendencies towards inclusion and exclusion in international collaboration. New higher education systems and universities are showing up on the map while others are dropping off. There is a greater flow of students between certain countries and certain institutions, while others are shriveling up and fading away. And all of this generates outcomes that affect our world. We as members of higher education and contributors to society have a big obligation and responsibility to understand what's going on, and to flag issues and problems as they arise. The [African Association of Universities](#) and the folks in Southeast Asia—they said there are disconcerting tendencies toward exclusion in the emerging global higher education landscape. And most people are not paying enough attention to this.

NAFSA has a role to play here, because it is a nonprofit organization. In terms of who is setting the agenda, who is gathering and promoting data or research, it is better to have NAFSA play a role versus a consultant in another country, or a government ministry. The latter could have obvious political motivations.

NAFSA: *If you could have your crystal ball out, what do you see as the “big trends” for the next five, ten, fifteen years in the global higher education landscape?*

Olds: One would clearly be the trend to see higher education as an export industry on the same level as other exports. It is now on the “services export agenda.” Some countries are starting to calculate returns on investment and use them to make sense of what is going on, and to legitimize international student mobility. So for good and for bad, this is clearly one trend. Canada is a good example: They recently created an international strategy [to assess the economic contributions of international students]. Canada’s former minister of international trade played a role in devising that strategy, and they hired a consultant to do the work and calculate the numbers. So, it’s happening. This is why it’s important to know how to calculate numbers, to understand what is logical and rigorous, and what is not.

Another trend is that countries increasingly view education as a form of soft power. You’d think some countries would have done this a long time ago, or more vigorously. But now some are developing a strategy. Canada, again, provides an example of this. They recognize the power of having alumni overseas as “ambassadors.” It’s starting to become clearer in the United States, too—especially after [U.S. military involvement in] Iraq and Afghanistan.

A third trend would be, both positively and negatively, an increasing desire to harness higher education to facilitate economic development at the local, city, regional scale. This might involve allowing more foreign students who might stay on to take up temporary or permanent residence. We see this happening in Australia. Higher education is being asked to contribute more to economic development, or universities are volunteering that information. That’s likely to happen more and more.

Finally, and this goes back to the IAU meeting in Mexico, there are some people who are worried about a growing tendency of exclusion. Some institutions are doing very well despite the global economic crisis. Others are actually falling off the map with too many missions to fulfill, cutbacks here and there, and certain regions losing coverage. We will see in some cases greater inequities and concentration of resources among higher education institutions and higher education systems.

NAFSA: *What further resources in your own field of geography would you recommend NAFSAns be aware of, and, as a related question, how do you find and use those resources?*

Olds: The obvious resource here is cartography. A lot of geography departments have geographic information systems (GIS) and cartography programs. Cartography students are always looking for projects—mapping projects—and could easily help create projects to map out student mobility. In fact, I had a student who was doing similar work on study abroad. As a PhD student in sociology, she was interested in the University of Wisconsin-Madison and its international partners over time, and of all of its different global connections, in aggregate, on the basis of gender, discipline, and so on. She worked with our cartography department to map all this out. Having these maps get created helps people make sense of things visually.

Theoretically, once such maps are made, anybody could use them for different purposes, whether you're interested in study abroad on a gender perspective, or you're interested in regional connections, or being aware of growing trends as you manage your international student services office. If that's all visualized, it can be a very effective mechanism to prove your case, versus lines of text.

The other suggestion would be to create larger research projects for your faculty around campus, in order to involve different faculty from different disciplines. Such research projects might range from information on the knowledge economy, to student mobility, to this question of "global competency." There are a lot of existing resources on campus at U-Madison that were never drawn upon in these debates about global competency. There are great people working in English literature, in history, yet sometimes the international "division" or office attempts to reinvent the wheel. Yet these efforts don't have to be that ambitious—it could be a task force or a debate. A debate about global citizenship, for example, that occurs between the dean of the business school and an English literature professor who knows about colonialism. That would be interesting. ■

Teaching Within a Culturally Defined Framework

A Conversation with Gavin Sanderson, PhD

Submitted by Linda Drake Gobbo

This Q&A is taken from conversation at the NAFSA 2010 Annual Conference & Expo in Kansas City, MO, with Gavin Sanderson, deputy director of academic learning services at the University of South Australia. The title of Sanderson's seminar was "Internationalizing the Academic Self: Learning and Teaching in International Higher Education."

NAFSA: *How does the topic of your presentation and your work impact the field of international education as currently defined?*

Sanderson: As a person who is writing in the field, you can publish and get an article out, but you don't know where it's going or who is going to read it. In some ways, it is really hard to predict how your work is going to impact the field on a state, national, or international level.

However, as Salmon Rushdie said [in his NAFSA address on June 1, 2010], globalization is not going away. So how do people visualize globalization, and how should they react to it? What should we do? Whether the issue under discussion is the future of fossil fuels, or world economies, the cultures involved continue to operate alongside the issues. So if I am writing about how to successfully operate in an environment and can generate useful thought and conversation about its surrounding culture, so much the better.

The spirit of internationalism is very strong at this conference. [Internationalism is like] internationalization, but defined as [a movement of] understanding, acceptance, interconnectedness, respect, and plurality. I think UNESCO had a good response to contemporary globalization back in 1996. It spoke about education in the twenty-first century, saying we have to learn to live together, and how education is the necessary vehicle by which we must achieve that. Though 14 years old, [the document] is still relevant despite what's happened since it was written. UNESCO identified four pillars, and learning to live together was the most significant one. I think this is still true.

NAFSA: *I'm struck by the "learning to live together" thread. The work of Jane Knight [professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education-University of Toronto] moves discussion on internationalization from the institutional level upward, to the national and regional levels. I was struck by your emphasis instead on moving deeper into the institution. When you tied together "teacher as self" and the ability to "learn to live together" at one-on-one or small-group levels, it seemed very tangible. It can be difficult to see where we as individuals can have impact on a larger national or regional scale.*

Sanderson: A lot of my writing on the topic is due to my personal experience living and working in Japan. I learned so much about myself that was never a part of the initial intention of going to such a different culture for an extended period of time. I look back now and see it was the catalyst for understanding who I was, and how I used my strengths and weaknesses as the starting point for building [a methodology].

NAFSA: *Absolutely, I had the same experience during my two years teaching international students in the United Kingdom. When you spoke at the conference about the most important qualities for teaching in these kinds of classrooms, it was interesting what people said. It took more than 5 minutes of conversation before someone said “a safe classroom,” or “knowing yourself as a teacher.”*

Sanderson: Not many people have really thought about the process of teaching in university. They don't spend much time thinking: Why do I teach as I do? What do I value as a teacher? How can I understand cultural differences in the classroom? The intercultural realm provides a place where people can examine their responses from cultural and teaching perspectives. If we can do that—if we can talk about these issues with our faculty—then all the better.

NAFSA: *You've talked about how to prepare faculty to have those kinds of conversations. Can you say more about that?*

Sanderson: You prepare faculty by meeting them where they are, but also by bringing them a bit beyond that as well. So: Consider all the avenues. For example, create workshops about how to teach international students, or how to grade their work.

If you unpack the activity of “teaching,” you can offer discrete activities, such as how to make group work effective in an intercultural setting. Group work is one of the great ways teaching and learning take place in Western institutions. However, many people who facilitate group work as lecturers have never done any reading on how to facilitate it, nor [have they the experience] of how to foster a positive classroom environment where people learn through mistakes.

If you introduce an intercultural example to faculty, such as how to have a good outcome with a mixed group of students, people are interested in hearing about it. Educators want to leave a workshop with hints and tips they can quickly implement. Give them five or six things they can walk away with.

There are other discrete teaching and learning activities where you can add an intercultural element and create faculty buy-in, such as how to set up group assignments or assessments. While in that conversation, raise the question: Does it matter who is in the classroom? Is this particular assessment a fair one to use in an intercultural setting? Using strong teaching and learning avenues is the entry point into the conversation.

NAFSA: *You said, “Culture has everything and nothing to do with teaching.” Could you expand on that?*

Sanderson: Culture has everything to do with teaching. Faculty sees culture in the classroom. They may wonder why the curriculum needs to be internationalized further, or why they need more examples of content from other places, or textbooks from another country. But largely when you are talking about culture and teaching, people are thinking about the “cultural other” as a student in the classroom. They're probably not thinking about Australian students in an Australian context who may be of Vietnamese ancestry, although that is culture in the classroom as well. They're thinking about those students from China and India in particular, and they want an answer on how to deal with particular types of students in the classroom. Most lecturers are dealing in stereotypes because that is what they see. For example, many Indian students in Australian classrooms are often [seen as those who] come up at the end of a lecture and want to ask questions or discuss the material. It would be helpful if you've got an experienced teaching colleague who can say to others, “This is not an indication that a class was bad, it is an indication of how

[students and teachers interact] in their home educational setting.” Understanding culture can inform teaching.

Australian higher education exists within a culturally defined framework. What does that mean for an Australian student who goes to Uzbekistan to study engineering? The way learning and teaching takes place in Uzbekistan is very different than the way it takes place in Australia. What’s valued in a culture is apparent in its teaching framework. As we get into unpacking that framework, you can see what predictable approaches to learning are taught in each culture. For example, in Australia we value and expect students to be critical thinkers. We can ask the question, “Do Australian students who come from high school enter our classes with the ability to do that already?” And if not, then we must help everyone to become critical thinkers. It then becomes a discussion of universal teaching strategies: What sort of teaching practices and activities can I do in the classroom that benefits everyone?

NAFSA: *You talked about [educational psychologist] John Biggs, and his three levels of teaching. Please expand on that.*

Sanderson: At Biggs’ “level three,” he says teaching has nothing to do with culture. What he implies is that it’s all about universal teaching strategies. Activities and practices that help international students in the classroom are going benefit most of the other students as well. It is not about culture, [it is about] just being a better teacher. But that can’t be your opening line with faculty, because if they haven’t spent time thinking about culture in general, and their own culture, they’ll miss the intersection of the two. For example, a teacher might go into the transnational setting and use humor as a mechanism to facilitate learning. Then he’ll come back and say, “Fifteen people in Hong Kong sat in the classroom, and I did what I normally do, and there was no response at all.” It makes you question yourself and your teaching; it is the process a transnational teacher goes through. But when you talk with the more experienced teachers, they tell you those students have a great sense of humor. This is where a faculty member learns culture has everything and nothing to do with teaching. Because you are teaching within the Chinese framework of education, the classroom will operate in that way.

NAFSA: *Any other resources you think would help international educators learn about this topic?*

Sanderson: I’ve tried to make my Web site into a resource for other people. For example, the quick links on my Web site go to places like TEDI, which is the Teaching and Educational Development Institute at the University of Queensland. They’ve got a lot of material about learning and teaching which is freely accessible. You can download material on culture in the classroom and how to do good assessment. Also, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council’s Web site is full of good practice ideas from Australian perspectives. Other good resources can be found on the Web site for the British Higher Education Academy, and within NAFSA’s material on intercultural citizenship.

NAFSA: *NAFSA has only recently gotten into the teaching component, which in part what made your work so exciting to us—the connection to teaching and learning.*

Sanderson: People like Paul Ramsden and John Biggs also have interesting things to say. If you look at all the major theorists around teaching and learning, none of them will talk about culture. They just talk about the theory of teaching. I guess that necessitates questioning the validity of particular cultural approaches to education. ■

On Research and Practice: Developing a Culture-Minded Professional

A Conversation with Josef Mestenhauser

This Q&A is taken from conversation with Josef Mestenhauser, professor emeritus in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development. In 2010, Mestenhauser was awarded NAFSA's Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship Knowledge Community (TLS KC) Award for Innovative Research and Scholarship in Internationalization at its annual conference in Kansas City, MO.

Mestenhauser's more than 50-year-long career includes roles as teacher, researcher, administrator, counselor and consultant. He has published extensively on international education, educational exchanges and international studies, cross-cultural relations, leadership development, cultural change, educational reform, and professionalism. He is a past president of NAFSA, the International Society for Educational, Cultural and Scientific Interchanges (ISECSI), and the Fulbright Association of Minnesota.

NAFSA: *Why is research important in an organization such as NAFSA, composed largely of practitioners?*

Mestenhauser: Practice is based on knowledge and practical issues, and gives rise to more knowledge in turn. Professionalism is defined in terms of people who—among other criteria—possess practical and theoretical knowledge they use for the benefit of their clients in important human services. Too much emphasis on practical skills—which some practitioners see as a dominant concern—is a shortcut to knowledge.

I am critical of recent efforts to focus on “competencies.” These efforts result in a shopping list of many attributes that do not address what we know about the world or what we know about ourselves in the world. Nor does it elucidate others’ knowledge of us. Some of these so-called competencies are not in fact competencies, but are rather personality attributes. For example, if open mindedness is considered a competence, one can be open-minded but also arrogant, ignorant, or domineering. I am also critical of the tendency to focus on “successful practices” because they encourage imitation, are specific to a single institution, or confuse the practices of the profession with “projects.”

From its early years, NAFSA started with a strong research committee and acknowledged the need for research by having an active committee. However, that was eventually disbanded precisely on the ground that NAFSA was an organization of practitioners. The consequence was that funding agencies, most notably foundations, supported disciplinary faculty members to do research which, regrettably, resulted in a lot of disciplinary theories being tried on educational exchanges, without shedding light on either the exchanges or the discipline.

NAFSA: *In your view, what are the critical issues that need research attention?*

Mestenhauser: While we have been focused on issues that address services and administration—which must not be neglected—the more important issues by far are those that go beyond services, administration, and projects. Falling back again on the literature about professionalism, one of these issues is our “contribution to society.” In our field, of course, we would define “society” very broadly, as we think of global education.

We need to identify issues and concepts that are the most difficult to teach and explain to people, including faculty. We need to think of internationalization of the curriculum in larger terms than about individual courses or instructors, and identify the forces that resist internationalization of entire disciplines.

We also need to address the potential of designing learning situations that help accelerate learning. For example, the field of international education sits on two of the most powerful multipliers of learning, namely foreign students and study abroad programs, but they appear to be as separate as day and night. Yet emerging literature about the functioning of the brain suggests learning is accelerated if one type of learning is accompanied with another form of learning.

NAFSA: *What topics would you advise graduate students interested in our field to pursue?*

Mestenhauser: First, I would advise them to study the history of international education. Without history, we have no identity. People entering the field—and there are very many all the time, not just in the United States, but around the world—do not really know what the field is, how they can grow with it, or what contribution they can make, not just to individual students, but to humankind.

On that note, reconstructing the history of international education is not easy. Often when you read about the history of a professional field, the narrative tends to focus on “progress,” which is often self-congratulatory and misses the dynamics of development which include serious conflicts and conceptual disagreements. We should be reminded the history of international education is not just the history of NAFSA, but is much broader—a history in which NAFSA plays an essential, but not exclusive, role.

Graduate students might also pursue research on the descriptive aspects of what people call “transformational experiences” from study abroad— not just students going abroad from the United States, but students going abroad from all countries. If these experiences are truly transformational, we need to know what the major factors are that contribute to that feeling, and how they are sustained. We often refer to “cognitive shifts” that result in our exposure to another culture, but we lack solid evidence of these cognitive shifts and what they mean on a greater scale.

The next area of research that concerns me very much are the dispositions or mindsets that represent deeply held views, not necessarily connected to people of other cultures, but to life in general related to education, economics, politics, and so on. These mindsets are results of continued exposure to a culture over a long period of time, and they are often barriers to internationalization because they are held even by faculty members and high-level university administrators.

The present assessment-oriented research about global competencies does not address these mindsets. I would like to see some research on the structure of these mindsets, and how they can be changed to accommodate an international perspective. A group of bright and sophisticated researchers posing hard

questions on this issue might result not only in good research, but also the possibly of alerting faculty to a necessary mind shift—an incidental gain from research.

I find the concept that is most difficult for faculty to understand is “culture.” Culture is several things; it operates on different levels of abstraction and different levels of analyses. As researchers have found, the more one looks at culture as specific behavior, the more one sees psychology, sociology, political science, and economics—but not culture—from which these fields are derived. Researchers call this the “fading quality of culture” that makes it difficult for the hard-core social sciences to confront the concept of culture and thus deal with cultural differences. This is especially true of the so-called “policy sciences,” whose bias is concerned with policy that influences governments (such as foreign policy). These sciences are assumed to be research and data-driven, thus, “culture-free.”

The final area in which we need research is the nature of the field itself, and the kind of professionalism it represents. People who enter the field need to know about all of its parts, from the key literature and concepts on which practice is based, to where positions fall in institutional hierarchies. ■