2019 AIEA Annual Conference

Roundtable: Are Ethics Optional? Maintaining a Moral Compass Amid Internationalization's Competing Demands
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This roundtable focused on recognizing current ethical quandaries that senior international officers face and identifying best practices towards ethical comprehensive internationalization strategies.

Themes from current ethical quandaries facing senior international officers:

International Student Services and Recruitment
This was the area that was discussed most extensively in the roundtable discussion – in particular, ideas around international student preparation, treatment of international students once on-campus, and issues around recruitment strategies.

Participants observed that there is sometimes a disconnect between marketing to international students versus the reality once on-campus, resulting in international students feeling mislead. There was also discussion around the idea that international student preparation might be lacking, particularly around issues such as unclear or inconsistent policies, institutional culture, and guidelines around academic integrity. Participants mentioned challenges around balancing intercultural dynamics: does our current approach implicitly or explicitly "expect" international students to assimilate, rather than learning from and respecting their worldviews? Are institutions responding adequately to bias incidents involving international students or xenophobia more broadly? How can international education leaders combat these trends in situations where faculty members—and others—may feel that international students take resources away from domestic students? Also mentioned was differential consequences to policies for international vs. domestic students (e.g., in cases where immigration may be involved) and the implications.

The group discussed concerns with contracted agents using recruitment tactics that are not transparent or aligned with institutional values, as well as potential conflicts around using alumni for recruitment; in essence, "agentizing" international student alumni.

Much of this was discussed within the context of a push for recruitment of international students to increase revenue for the institution: on the one hand, even written strategic plans tend to articulate the need to actively recruit international students because they are typically full-fee paying and bring needed revenue to the university; on the other, many institutions fail to provide resources sufficient to serve and integrate these students into the campus community. Specifically, the idea that senior administration often juggles these conflicting or competing goals and rationales came up as problematic.

Strategic Partnerships
At times, there is incomplete disclosure or a lack of transparency in international strategic partnerships. Whether they are mutually beneficial is not always measured and assessed. In regards to selecting international partners, participants observed that there were often extractive partnerships.

Education abroad
As with international students, there was discussion about transparency or truthfulness in how study abroad is marketed, as well as the rhetoric around the importance of study abroad to those who might not be able to afford it. One emblematic question: should we encourage students to take out loans to study abroad? With the proliferation of faculty-led programs, there were questions around the fairness of faculty stipends (possibly too high at some institutions) and concerns related to the number of credits awarded for short programs.

Politics: at home and abroad
Participants discussed the overall challenge of navigating the intersection of politics and internationalization, particularly around issues such as human rights (and even more specifically, the geopolitical conflict between Canada and China). At home, there is sometimes a perception, particularly at public institutions, that international students take resources from domestic students—a particularly salient concern in the context of rising populism worldwide.

Best practices identified by roundtable participants:

- As a response to the commoditization of international students, a simplistic but crucial approach is to ensure that international students' needs are met, and that there is transparency in communication and guidelines for recruitment. Resources include the International Student Mobility Charter and the American International Recruitment Council's (AIRC) Institutional Best Practices.
- Generally, SIOs can look to ethical guidelines or principles as a starting point for values-based decision-making. These are available from different professional associations, such as NAFSA, CBIE, The Forum on Education Abroad, or IAU (.pdf). SIOs can also look to institutional values or ethics statements for this values-based approach.
- SIOs can create or adapt existing partnership criteria or checklists that ensure mutuality, transparency, and regular assessment from both parties to ensure equitable partnerships.
- A student-centered approach is also key and will address many of these issues. While international education leaders must engage with and satisfy many different stakeholders, it can often be at the expense of those who should be and should remain the center of internationalization's focus: students.
- Consider de-emphasizing metrics that reinforce problematic tendencies (e.g., international student revenue targets).

- Focus on "transformational" and transformative purpose in internationalization programs. One concept: establish the values that are key to an institution (and its internationalization strategy), then measure any action against those values. Do they align? If not, what does that lack of alignment "say"?
- SIOs should intentionally pause to think about ethical implications of decisions or programs. Simply pausing to consider values and ask simple, key questions (e.g. "Is this ethical?" "Are we harming others?") can be helpful.