



# AIEA PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

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## **Internationalization as a Driver for Research, Education, and Regional Development**

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*Vice-Rector*





## PROVOST PERSPECTIVES

**Name:** Marilza Vieira Cunha Rudge

**Title:** Vice-Rector, Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) (São Paulo State University)

**Time served as Provost:** Since 2013

Recognized as one of Brazil's most important universities, UNESP is an example of a successful multi-campus institution. One of three state universities in São Paulo and founded in 1976, UNESP's mission is to promote professional training committed to quality of life, technological innovation, social sustainability and equity, human rights and democracy. UNESP's programs in theoretical and experimental disciplinary areas are offered by 34 units in 24 cities and include engineering, health, communications, humanities, social sciences, and arts, among others.

Vice-Rector Marilza Vieira Cunha Rudge, Professor in the School of Medicine at Botucatu–UNESP, has served as UNESP's Vice Rector since 2013, and was Vice-President for Graduate Studies from 2005 to 2012. A member of the Board of Trustees of the Sao Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), she earned a degree in medicine from the School of Medicine of Botucatu in 1969 and served as a resident in OBGYN in the Public State Hospital from 1970 to 1972. She earned a PhD in Sciences from the School of Medicine, Unicamp, in 1976.



**Given all of the demands and constraints facing higher education today, why did your institution decide to internationalize?**

UNESP is one of the most important higher education institutions in Brazil, with solid research activities and local and international recognition in various rankings. UNESP sees international cooperation as a way to have greater social and technological impact by expanding its research fields and helping it raise external financing for the development of large projects. Such cooperation also creates a research environment with an international flavor and serves to expand international joint research programs. Besides enhancing the university's visibility, joint research projects have naturally led to cutting-edge publications, double or joint degrees, and an expansion of student and faculty international mobility. UNESP's internationalization has also benefited students: The multi-cultural perspectives facilitated by UNESP's internationalization enable students to better compete in the global labor market.

**Has the role or importance of internationalization at your institution changed over the past five years? If so, how? How do you see it changing in the next five?**

Internationalization has played an increasingly important role within UNESP's initiatives. In contrast to other initiatives, however, internationalization cuts across initiatives, and involves all academic areas of the university. A single budget, specific for internationalization activities, has been established, and programs have been developed in line with the institutional development plan. Moving toward the future, UNESP intends to expand the number of its strategic university partnerships. In doing so, it will focus on complementary strengths and capabilities that can result in a win-win relationship for both parties.

**What were some of the main challenges you and your institution faced in pursuing internationalization? What are some of assets you and your institution drew on for this work?**

In order to tackle the challenges that internationalization poses, we had to establish and develop an internationalization culture at the university. Seminars and workshops focused on the development of strategies, many of which were later implemented. Through this work, a consensus has emerged that one of the main priorities should be the establishment of strategic partnerships that include dual degree activities, student and faculty mobility, and joint projects that will also result in high impact joint publications. For this purpose, financing strategies that stimulate the internationalization of education, including research activities, have been essential. Thus, it is imperative that internationalization issues be key considerations in all budgetary, administrative, academic, and



governance decisions. We now know what to do and how to do it in order to achieve our objectives, and are currently in the process of identifying the most suitable partners.

**What is an example of an internationalization effort on your campus that was not completely successful? Why was that the case, and what did your institution learn from it?**

One of the central points in the internationalization projects of institutions all over the world is attracting and retaining the best brains, be they students, professors, or researchers. UNESP shares this concern. However, with Portuguese the language spoken in Brazil, language is a complicating factor in attracting talent. To address this challenge, UNESP developed a pioneering program in Brazil to offer subjects in English. Although we have hosted more than 100 students from 39 countries under the program in the past two years, our initial expectations have not been met. One of the lessons learned is that creating a program is not enough. It is necessary to show the potential gains for participants. For the program to succeed, it will also be necessary to strengthen the UNESP brand, so that the strengths of the institution are better and more widely understood.

**Conversely, please discuss an example of an initiative that did work, and why.**

Considering that research cooperation is a central objective of UNESP, conducting international workshops, both at UNESP and abroad, has been the most successful internationalization initiative. The workshops are a high priority and are backed by a commitment of institutional funding. The workshops offer researchers and students with common interests the opportunity to exchange scientific information and to establish joint research projects. As a result, solid and lasting partnerships for more qualified scientific development have been established, more researches and students have international experience, and external funds have been raised. Another example of a successful initiative is the implementation of a doctoral program designed specifically for South American university academic staff. Currently, this program enrolls over 80 PhD students from outside Brazil per year.

**Who are the most important stakeholders you work with regarding internationalization at your institution?**

When addressing internationalization related to mobility and international cooperation, two stakeholders stand out. For mobility, the participation of the administrative staff is important, as we rely on these staff to manage mobility, communicate effectively about opportunities, and welcome and support both



incoming students and UNESP students who go abroad. Regarding international cooperation, the activities of researchers are essential. They are the ones who demonstrate the competence that exists at the university and develop the institutional partnerships strategically defined by the institution.

**What are some of the key ways in which senior international officers can help individuals in your role advance internationalization at their institutions?**

Lavoisier has noted that that in this world “nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed . . .” The internationalization of higher education institutions is no different. The experience and expertise developed by senior international officers is essential for the development of shortcuts that can help new institutions, such as UNESP, to identify and achieve their goals. The experience and successful stories senior international officers bring are critical to avoiding mistakes and enjoying repeated success.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with senior international officers or fellow chief academic officers?**

Rankings are directly or indirectly associated with the internationalization of universities all over the world. Although rankings measure specific issues, they are associated in the minds of people who work in higher education with the quality of institutions. However, the best higher education institutions in Latin America, including UNESP, not only pursue excellence in education and research, but have a significant social commitment to the countries and the regions in which they are located. This commitment and its results are generally not considered in the rankings, although they should be. In addition, the most relevant institutions in Latin America do not charge tuition but are funded by the state. This financing model influences comparisons across rankings. As rankings for research and quality of education correlate strongly with quantity of resources, Latin American universities tend to rate lower than universities in some other regions. The important role institutions of higher education play in acting as drivers for the development of a region or country should be weighed against universities that focus more narrowly on specific research objectives. This is a matter that should be widely discussed in the higher education internationalization scene.



The **Association of International Education Administrators** (AIEA), a membership organization formed in November 1982, is composed of institutional leaders engaged in advancing the international dimensions of higher education. The purposes of the Association are to:

- Provide an effective voice on significant issues within international education at all levels,
- Improve and promote international education programming and administration within institutions of higher education,
- Establish and maintain a professional network among international education institutional leaders,
- Cooperate in appropriate ways with other national and international groups having similar interests.

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