



AIEA PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

MARCH 2024

Daniel A. Wubah • *Millersville University of Pennsylvania*





PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

Daniel A. Wubah

1. How would you describe the role of internationalizing higher education today?

Internationalization enriches higher education and prepares graduates for a globalized world in a multifaceted manner; however, navigating its complexities and addressing challenges are crucial to ensuring that the internationalization efforts contribute to a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future. Today, internationalizing higher education leads to the creation of global learning communities and shared cooperation between campuses. Such communities empower international educators by broadening and engaging a world-connected network that meets the needs for sharing educational resources, designing and delivering new curricula, and collaborating through strategic partnerships.

Most universities emphasize their mission of teaching, research, service, and innovation. The value that internationalization adds to these attributes includes enhancing research and knowledge creation whereby global collaboration stimulates innovation, fosters diverse perspectives, and leads to solutions with broader impact. Also, exposure to different cultures prepares graduates for the global workforce and helps them navigate a diverse world. Universities with strong international programs attract more international students and faculty, which can elevate the institutional profile. Promoting economic and social development through international partnerships and knowledge exchange contributes towards technological advancement and societal progress. Such partnerships expand access to education across borders through online learning.

Students who take part in global education receive a more holistic education that better prepares them to become highly engaged citizens. Ultimately, our universities need to cooperate with their international partners within a global learning network by actively planting and growing their academic “footprint” across the world. Establishing micro-campuses through virtual, social interaction and multiple delivery models such as hybrid, online, and on-campus would create a positive impact for communities.



2. How do you see the role of senior leaders and the president in particular in internationalizing higher education?

Under conventional models, senior leaders and presidents play secondary or tertiary roles in internationalizing higher education on their campuses. They support these global efforts as they would oversee a variety of activities on a U.S. campus. However, current senior leaders, especially presidents, must play a pivotal role in driving and shaping the internationalization of higher education. They must provide visionary leadership and serve as strategic advocates who enable and empower the entire university to prioritize global education. The president must set the tone and direction by articulating a clear vision for internationalization and align it with institutional values and strategic goals. At Millersville University (MU), I serve as a champion for global education, not only because I came to the U.S. for my graduate education as a foreign student, but because internationalization is built into our core values of exploration, professionalism, public mission, integrity, inclusion, and compassion (EPPIIC). Presidents should cultivate a culture of global engagement by promoting intercultural understanding and celebrating diversity. Building relationships with international partners, especially foreign universities, governments, and organizations, can open doors for resource exchange. My senior leadership team contributes towards global education by being instrumental in allocating resources to support international initiatives and supporting student mobility, research partnerships, international faculty recruitment, and curriculum development. I garner support for global education across campus by sharing stories of successful initiatives through social media when I travel abroad.

Among the challenges that my senior leadership team faces is how to balance internationalization with other institutional resource needs, but if done right it can be a net revenue generator. Navigating cultural differences and ethical considerations, promoting opportunities for participants from diverse backgrounds as well as addressing potential sensitivities in international partnerships are all important.

By providing strong leadership, vision, and resources, presidents can play a crucial role in enabling higher education institutions to embrace the opportunities and navigate the challenges of internationalization. Their leadership can contribute towards a more globally connected and diverse educational landscape.





3. How is your institution measuring internationalization's contribution to meeting its institutional mission?

At Millersville University, internationalization is a key component in our mission to serve as a community dedicated to high quality education at an exceptional value. Measuring the impact of internationalization is an ongoing process that involves aligning our mission statement with our strategic plan. However, it can be complex because it involves diverse goals and impacts. So, our approach to determine the impact of global education involves defining our success metrics and using selected evaluation methods. We do so by identifying specific goals such as improving global awareness among students, attracting diverse talent, increasing the number of research collaborations, and promoting intercultural understanding. By developing measurable objectives for each metric, we are able to collect relevant qualitative and quantitative data such as the number of international students, faculty, research partnerships, students taking part in exchange programs, and alumni employed abroad.

By gathering feedback from students, faculty, and staff on their international experiences and perspectives through surveys and case studies, we gain deeper insights into the impact of higher education. It is important to note that isolating the specific contribution of internationalization can be challenging. For example, some of the benefits may take time to manifest, hence the need to use long-term evaluation cycles. Also, we have to ensure accurate and consistent data collection across different departments and initiatives. Our ongoing plan is to regularly review our goals, metrics, and methods to help us adapt and improve our internationalization efforts.

4. What resources are necessary to make internationalization sustainable in higher education?

Establishing a sustainable international program requires institutional commitment at all levels starting from the top to ensure proper resource allocation. Although higher education has resource challenges, any institution that is committed to internationalization must rethink and re-integrate creative strategies for sustainability and growth. Among the requirements that must be met are providing academic, financial, and structural resources. In addition to study abroad and exchange programs, integration of global perspectives and intercultural understanding into academic courses as well as creating opportunities for joint research with foreign universities are necessary. At MU, we are rethinking study





abroad by broadening our collaborations with international partners in different ways beyond sending students and faculty members. For example, we are in the process of establishing such a collaboration with the University of Cape Coast, Ghana in plastic recycling, which will involve internships and generate net revenue for the partner institutions.

U.S. universities need to review the directions and projections for international education and plan accordingly to create programs that can generate net revenue. For example, the 2020 National Education Plan of India aims to increase the gross enrollment ratio in post-secondary education from 26.3% (2018) to 50% by 2035. To accomplish this goal, India is promoting stronger partnerships with foreign universities. This provides an opportunity for U.S. universities to develop and implement long-term partnerships of mutual interest.

Allocating stable funding to support global education beyond one-off projects is essential because it helps to attract and support international students through scholarships. Opportunities also exist to partner with local groups and organizations to connect international students and faculty. For example, we have a strong partnership with the Church World Service whereby we provide scholarships for refugees. Institutions must develop a clear plan with measurable goals and milestones to track progress and ensure long-term viability. Ultimately, sustainable internationalization requires a multifaceted approach with a focus on revenue growth.

5. What might threaten progress toward the internationalization of higher education broadly and at your institution specifically?

Although internationalization offers numerous benefits by fostering a global perspective and enhancing the overall learning and working environment, there are several potential areas of concern that can threaten progress and diminish the positive impacts. Among these challenges are institutional, technological, political, accessibility and inclusivity as well as quality and ethical concerns.

Institutional inertia can impede progress in internationalization. This may be due to inadequate leadership, lack of a clear vision or fragmented implementation of plans. Usually, such situations can lead to insufficient investment in global education and create competition for resources.

Another major challenge is an overemphasis on attracting fee-paying international students, which could prioritize financial gain over academic quality and ethical partnerships. Internationalization must address historical disparities and promote





equal partnerships to avoid a Western-dominated focus, especially because existing gaps in access to resources and educational opportunities can limit opportunities for students from underprivileged backgrounds. Also, some marginalized groups often feel excluded due to lack of language support and culturally insensitive practices.

Policies that prioritize domestic interests over international partnerships and student exchange can significantly hamper progress. Stringent immigration policies such as visa restrictions, high and/or increased travel costs can discourage international student and scholar exchanges. Inadequate digital access and skills can limit opportunities for online international learning and research collaborations. Finally, institutions need to protect student data and navigating ethical issues in online learning and research collaborations require careful policies and practices.

At MU, the main threats are creating a critical mass of international students, faculty, and staff and convincing faculty to integrate global concepts into their courses. By prioritizing ethical partnerships, fostering inclusivity, and adapting to changing circumstances, the internationalization of higher education can continue to play a positive role in fostering global understanding and knowledge creation.

