Transformation in the times of a Global Pandemic
Associations in Internationalisation of Higher Education
Leading the Change

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APRIL 2021 THIRD EDITION

SYMBIOSIS CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (SCES)
SYMBIOSIS CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (SCIE)
Pro Chancellor’s Desk

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar
Pro Chancellor
Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU
Executive Director
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Editor’s Desk

Dr. Anita Patankar
Deputy Director
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Prof. Nidhi Piplani Kapur
Head
Symbiosis Centre for European Studies (SCES)

Contributors

Contributors from- Belgium, India, United States, The Netherlands and Spain

In Spotlight

Dr. (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal
Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU)

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar
Pro Chancellor
Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU

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Published By: Symbiosis Centre of European Studies (SCES)
Symbiosis Centre of International Education (SCIE)

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar, Pro-Chancellor, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU Executive Director, Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Edited By: Dr. Anita Patankar, Deputy Director, Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)
Prof. Nidhi Piplani Kapur, Head – Symbiosis Centre for European Studies (SCES)

Editorial Support Team: Ms. Mrunal Sule, Symbiosis Centre for European Studies (SCES);
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Mr. Akshay Lahade, Symbiosis Centre for European Studies (SCES);
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Ms. Anna Bondar, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine

Ms. Samita Kulkarni, Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)

Concept and Design By: Ms. Deepika Naidu, Symbiosis Institute of Design (SID)

Address: Third Floor, Symbiosis Vishwabhavan, Senapati Bapat (S.B) Road,
Pune - 411004, Maharashtra, India

Website: www.scie.ac.in; www.siu.edu.in
Email: sces@scie.ac.in

© Symbiosis International (Deemed University)
It gives me immense pleasure to share that Symbiosis International University (SIU) which was established with the vision of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam- The World is One Family’ has been promoting and contributing to internationalisation of higher education in India for the last 50 years.

This year has been special for many occasions, first and foremost being the ‘Golden Jubilee Year’ of Symbiosis. The dream of my father Prof. (Dr.) S. B. Mujumdar who established Symbiosis for making it a ‘home away from home’ for International students has promoted internationalisation in India. The National Education policy that was rolled out recently by the Govt. of India has also given importance to internationalisation of higher education.

I am happy to dedicate our third edition to ‘Transformation in the times of a global pandemic - Associations in International Higher Education leading the change’. For a couple of years now, we at Symbiosis and the international higher education community in India have been discussing the need to have a network to promote internationalisation in India. I am glad to share my perspectives with you in the spotlight section with my very good friend, Dr. (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General of the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and take you behind the scenes into the making of this new network- Indian Network for International Education (INIE).

We believe the time is ripe for India to have such a network and we invite our friends from across the world to engage with us through INIE and this network too will assist universities in India to realize the internationalisation goal of the new National Education Policy, 2020.

I hope this edition will help ignite discussions on such diverse topics that will inspire readers.

— Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar
Pro Chancellor
Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU
Executive Director
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)
I am happy to share our third edition on 'Associations in IHE leading the change'. Over these many years, I have enjoyed the collaborative discussions and productive engagements with members of associations that work in the higher education space. The cause of internationalisation of higher education specifically has been led in great part by associations like EAIE, IIE, AIU, IAU, NAFSA, OBREAL-Global, and many others. Very often change needs catalysts and support agents. I believe these associations play this yeoman service. Policy and education reform requires ‘think tanks’ to provide research based insights and recommendations along with expertise and best practice analysis from across the world. I am glad this edition which is being released at the time of our 5th edition of the IHE conference series on 'Reimagining Internationalisation: Blended Education as a Catalyst' will help us focus on the role that these associations play in helping us bring about much needed change.

— Dr. Anita Patankar  
Deputy Director  
Symbiosis Centre for International Education (SCIE)
2021 is the harbinger of hope. Hope for vaccines to fight the global pandemic, hope for resilience, hope for strengthened partnerships! Amidst all the uncertainty, collaboration was the key and the International Higher Education sector realized this quite early on.

The associations and networks in the field form a collective global voice in higher education. The thriving sector put on a halt due to covid-19 disruption is now being reimagined and we are happy to release this edition during Symbiosis International University (SIU) - Association of Indian Universities (AIU) annual Internationalisation of Higher Education Conference on “Reimagining Internationalisation- Blended Education as Catalyst” – April 6-9, 2021.

In this third edition, we bring you perspectives from 9 authors representing 6 associations/networks who found their ways to 'be the change' in these pressing times. This e-magazine will be ready reckoner for you to get insight into the responses and initiatives of these associations and networks to rebuild the momentum, engage with their community and be a positive reinforcement in this dark hour.

We throw a spotlight on Dr. (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal and Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar who share the story behind the scenes into the making of India’s first – Indian Network for Internationalisation of Education (INIE).

I am very pleased to share this third edition that is your space for international higher education inclusion which will be useful for university leaders, researchers in international education, IROs and other colleagues who are deeply impacted, yet are experimenting new ways of advancing internationalization. Hope this will provide inspiration for the dynamic times now and ahead.

We would love to hear back from you with all that inspires you and you’d like to read in our future editions at sces@scie.ac.in

― Prof. Nidhi Piplani Kapur
Head
Symbiosis Centre for European Studies (SCES)
The Netherlands

Mr. Leonard Engel

Leonard Engel is Executive Director of the European Association for International Education (EAIE). He holds a Master of Public Administration from the Dutch School of Public Administration (NSOB) The Hague, and an MA in Literature from Leiden University, the Netherlands. Leonard is an experienced manager in higher education and a specialist in internationalisation and student affairs.

Belgium

Ms. Olivia Parczyk

Olivia Parczyk currently holds the position of Liaison Officer for Asia at the Erasmus Student Network, where she manages the organization’s ties to stakeholders and institutions in Asia. Before entering this position, she acted as National President of ESN Germany. Besides her work with ESN she is currently finishing her graduate studies in Psychology.
Dr. Darla K. Deardorff

Darla K. Deardorff is Executive Director of the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA). In addition, she is a research scholar at Duke University’s Social Science Research Institute and holds faculty positions at universities in several countries, including as faculty of Harvard University’s Global Education Think Tank. She is author/editor of 10 books and over 60 book chapters.

Mr. Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez

Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez, Ph.D. (he/him/his/él) is CONAHEC’s mobility programs coordinator. He is also an independent scholar with a research agenda focused on international and comparative higher education.

Mr. Sean Manley-Casimir

Sean Manley-Casimir is executive director of the 501c3 non-profit Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC). CONAHEC connects over 150 member higher education institutions of various types, sizes and profiles, all sharing interest in collaborating with North American institutions. If your higher education institution is interested in participating, please contact us.

Ms. Clare Overmann

Clare Overmann is the Head of Higher Education Initiatives at the Institute of International Education (IIE). In this role, she oversees external-facing initiatives, such as the IIENetwork Membership. Clare also directs IIE’s Center for International Partnerships, providing programs and training on developing academic partnerships. She holds a BA from Georgetown University and an MA from New York University.
Spain

Dr. Nicolas Patrici

Nicolas Patrici is one of the directors of OBREAL Global. Dr. Patrici has an extensive experience in education management and international cooperation. He has worked extensively in higher education projects and regional integration initiatives in India, Oman, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ms. Elizabeth K. Colucci

Elizabeth Colucci currently serves as the International Projects Director for the OBREAL Global Observatory, based in Barcelona, a membership organisation that provides a platform for strategic partnerships between the EU, Latin America and different regions of the world.

India

Mr. Vivek Mansukhani

Vivek Mansukhani is the Head of the Institute of International Education (IIE) office in India. He leads a team that manages several scholarship and fellowship programs, advances access to education for women and girls, builds higher education partnerships and offers IIE’s expertise in international education consulting and research to foundations, governments, corporations and higher education institutions.
Indian Network of International Education (INIE)

In Spotlight

Dr. (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal
Secretary General
Association of Indian Universities (AIU)
India

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar
Pro Chancellor
Symbiosis International (Deemed University), SIU
India
Tell us all about INIE and how this idea came up? What objectives will it serve for higher education in India?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) is an association of about 822 universities and is actively engaged in academics, research and internationalization of higher education. During the meetings of the AIU with the Vice Chancellors, it was often felt that many of the Indian universities wish to promote internationalization but are not aware of the ways to do it in terms of contacting and collaborating with foreign universities, inviting foreign professors, attracting foreign students etc. It has always been lurking in my mind that we should find a solution to this. Luckily, I met Dr. Esther D Brimmer, CEO, NAFSA in a conference jointly organised by AIU and World Bank on 13th January, 2020 wherein it transpired that the countries with a strong and active network can support the internationalization agenda, mission and activities in a better way. It was also observed that many countries have a network of their own for international educators but India does not have any such network so far. It was, therefore, felt that AIU should take a lead in establishing Indian network of international higher education.

The proposed network can work as a common platform to bring together multiple organizations and institutions, both public and private, to address the common goal of promoting internationalization of higher education in India. The network shall provide multiple and diverse perspective through which the members can learn while sharing experiences and practices.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: INIE is the Indian Network of International Education. Most regions in the world have such networks, like the African Network for International Education. We felt that Indian universities need to come together and form a network of not just themselves, but to invite even other international networks with the clear objective to bring internationalisation of higher education to the forefront. In India there are very few universities that actually have internationalisation as a critical area of functioning. With globalisation and its impact felt across all aspects of life, it is time that higher education be truly internationalised. There should be a free flow of students and faculty across the globe, and because of the free flow of trade, curriculum should be internationalised as well. For those students who can't travel, internationalisation at home should be practised. Now, how do we bring this element of internationalisation into all our universities? This is what this network will discuss and deliberate on to assist the universities who want to make this shift. This is actually a network we had envisioned four years back, when Shri. Prakash Javadekar, the then education minister, had inaugurated the Internationalisation of Higher Education (IHE) conference at Symbiosis. This was then also discussed with Dr. Jane Knight who is an acknowledged international academic, and also the one who formulated the African Network of International Education. This was also discussed with Dr. Esther Bremmer, the Executive Director & CEO of NAFSA who was also present at IHE. At the end, we at Symbiosis thought that AIU would be the best organisation to form such a network as it already has more than 800 members of Indian universities.

Do you envisage having global associations/networks collaborating to mentor INIE and help it evolve as a strong network for Indian HEIs?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: INIE seeks to enrol universities, international educators as well as other international and national networks as its members to support the objective of the network. The other significant networks which may be approached are NAFSA, OBREAL, African Network for Internationalization of Education (ANIE), European Association for International Education (EAIE), Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), International Network of Universities (INU), International Network of Educational Institutes (INIE), International Network of Education for Work (INEW), Alliance for International Education (AIE), Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), The Asia-Pacific Association for International Education (APAIE), International Education Association of Australia (IEAA), Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC), Network of International Education Associations (NIEA) and International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA).

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: Yes, most certainly we would like to have the global networks associated with it so we can learn their best practices and they will also be able to contribute to Indian higher education. We live in a collaborative world. Organisations such as EAIE, African Network for Internationalisation, OBREAL-Global (which already has an Indian Wing), NAFSA, etc. should all be part of INIE to help it grow on the global platform.

What innovative practices do you plan to implement in the work of the India Network for Internationalisation of Higher Education, keeping in mind the knowledge and experience gained while working in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: INIE will be offering research-based policy advice and thought leadership interventions on internationalization of Higher Education. Post COVID 19 pandemic, there may be limited physical engagement between higher educational institutions and universities across geographies and hence, it is important that the foundational framework of a network like INIE should be based on the edifice of Industry 4.0 technologies. This will not only enable the INIE network to function effectively but will also help in widening its ambit.
of offering services to member institutions, thereby augmenting the quality of the higher education sector as a whole. The immediate focus area for INIE would be to create substantial (and innovative) opportunities for faculty and students to pursue international engagement through joint research projects, collaborative teaching-learning, student-/faculty mobility etc. both through face-to-face as well as the online/virtual mode.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: I think the pandemic has taught us that you cannot work alone and you need to work with other universities, institutions and with other networks. Whether it is research or teaching - collaboration is key. I think INIE with its global participation will improve the quality of higher education in Indian universities by practising Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). As mobility has been hampered, most of it will be done through international online education. During this pandemic we have realised that issues are not local but global and require global solutions.

With the NEP 2020, India will potentially become a focus for strategic international cooperation. How does AIU and SIU define and contribute to India’s policy making and advocacy with regards to internationalisation of higher education? Do you see the role of AIU and SIU changing in the near future and what would this new role be?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: The newly formulated National Education Policy 2020 envisages to promote Internationalization by bringing some structured policy reforms. Some of the major reforms recommended are setting up of International Students Office at each HEI hosting foreign students to coordinate all matters relating to International students, facilitating research/teaching collaborations and faculty/student exchanges with high-quality foreign institutions and signing of MoUs with foreign countries for mutual benefit, encouraging high performing Indian universities to set up campuses in other countries, inviting selected universities i.e., those from among the top 100 foreign universities to operate in India, permitting the credits transfer system as per the requirements of each HEI for the award of a degree. The most important recommendation is to enact/create a facilitative legislative provision for facilitating the entry of best foreign universities in India. Furthermore, research collaboration and student exchanges between Indian institutions and global institutions will be promoted through special efforts. The sole purpose is to promote India as a global study destination providing premium education at affordable costs. The AIU is poised to play a renewed role by establishing INIE. It will be a membership-based autonomous consortium aimed at creating a strong cohort of educators and administrators experienced in the field of international education.

AIU is also contemplating an AIU Collaboration Portal where-in all the member universities of AIU can showcase their best departments/centres/facilities where they wish to collaborate nationally or internationally. The information will be available on the AIU Collaboration Portal about the credibility of these departments in terms of academic programmes, research publications, faculty with Ph.D. qualifications, patents, awards, facilities and infrastructure in terms of books and journals and equipment. These will help the partner institutions to decide the university to collaborate with in specific subject domains.

To promote internationalization, AIU is also adopting a flexible approach for equivalence of foreign degrees with Indian degrees, a mandate given to AIU by the Ministry of Education. The mutual recognition of qualification is now envisaged to be based on the credit approach rather than the duration approach. For this, the exercise of credit mapping over various nations is being undertaken by AIU. It is felt that mutual recognition of qualification is one of the key areas to promote internationalization of higher education where AIU shall play a major role. The creation of INIE will also result in a bigger role for AIU to engage with the national and international community.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: After 34 years, NEP was rolled out in July 2020. In my opinion it is a very progressive policy. Internationalisation was not discussed in any of the prior policies, but is now very widely discussed. This is also an opportune time as India is at the cusp of becoming a knowledge power and centre. The world is now looking to India, more so because of the 2 COVID vaccines being manufactured here again in collaboration with international partners. The NEP has given a wonderful platform for internationalisation and India soon will emerge as a knowledge power and hub. SIU will play a great role being on various committees including being on the draft committee for NEP. Now when various committees are formed for implementation of NEP, again with global outreach, SIU sees its role and is contributing to a lot of policy making especially in the area of internationalisation.

What long term impact do you foresee of the pandemic on internationalization of higher education in India in general?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: The pandemic has definitely impacted international students’ mobility for some time. A large number of Indian students-second only to China- enrol in universities abroad, especially in countries worst affected by the pandemic, the US, UK and Australia. Many such students have now been barred from leaving these countries. If the situation persists, in the long run, a decline in the demand for international higher education may be expected.

However, it has also created new paradigms of the international collaborations in terms of online seminars, online
The INIE will be offering research-based policy contributions for International Education (AIE), Association of International Education. The other significant networks which may be envisaged to be based on the credit approach rather than the traditional examination system is now being recognized globally. The mutual recognition of qualifications is now a key contribution for INIE and AIU and SIU in creating sustainable and quality education systems which are accessible to all. These are things we are actually working on in three of our partner institutions to decide the university to collaborate with and manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term.

It will also be important to establish quality assurance mechanisms and quality benchmark for online learning offered by Indian HEIs as well as e-learning platforms (growing rapidly). Indian higher education system will also need to push itself towards collaborative learning by forging national and international collaboration which may be both in face-to-face as well as online mode.

The pandemic showed us how rapidly the modern world is changing every day. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly important to be sustainable. What changes would you like to see in the way Indian HE operates in the future?

**Dr. Pankaj Mittal**: The pandemic has transformed the centuries-old, chalk-talk teaching model to technology driven model. This disruption in the delivery of education is pushing policymakers to figure out how to make best use of technology while ensuring inclusive e-learning solutions and bridging the digital divide. A multi-pronged strategy is necessary to manage the crisis and build a resilient Indian education system in the long term.

How have the global pandemic affected global higher education standards and student/parent/society expectations? How do you suggest that education standards in India keep up with global standards? What specific actions/reforms would you suggest?

**Dr. Pankaj Mittal**: The inevitable crisis has impacted the new admissions, examinations, student internships, placements, withdrawal of job offers, and the students’ mobility. According to QS-Indian student’s mobility report (2020), COVID-19 had an impact on decision of 48.46% students who aspired to study abroad in the recent past. According to a report by Times Higher Education (THE) in the US alone, Indian students comprise of 18.4% of the total enrolment. Surely these enrolments are going to be affected amidst COVID-19. A comparative lower rate of employability in an already expensive international higher education domain will also play a significant role in this respect. The top five countries which are preferred study destination by Indian students include USA (30.27%), UK (15.84%), Germany (14.33%), Canada (9.18%) and Australia (6.75%). However, with the recent COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, students aspiring for higher education in these countries might re-consider their options.

A multi-pronged approach is required to prepare the higher education sector for the evolving demand-supply trends across the globe-particularly those related to the global mobility of students and faculty with a focus on improving the quality of higher education in India. Further, immediate measures are required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on job offers, internship programs, and research projects. In India, the digital divide, which has become more evident during pandemic has to be bridged urgently.

**Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar**: With the pandemic a lot of collaboration has happened, a lot of best practices have been imbibed in our university. Though physical mobility has been evolved from pre independence to post independence from pre globalisation to post globalisation. So we have seen a huge change and a whole evolution and now we have to come to a stage where we know it is not just leapfrogging but pole vaulting. I think the future of higher education in India is great with the new NEP being discussed not only in India but outside India. There are a lot of countries who would like to adapt it as it talks about liberating and educating young minds and not just training them for employment but training them for life - holistic education with deep rooted Indian values while also talking about global citizenship. The NEP with the backdrop of the pandemic will see a change in higher education where the future is in Asia and India. With the kind of youth that India has it will create competent human resources not just for India but for the world.
hampered, we have seen a rise in activities through virtual mobility. There are faculty and students who are virtually mobile. India has come a long way but still we falter in some areas specifically research due to lack of funding by the government and the universities. Higher education has been tuned to employment. To become a global power India has to do more research. The NEP is looking at formulating a National Research Foundation (NRF) and in the recent budget there is a huge fund allocation for it too, both public and private universities can compete for it. Once India makes a very conducive research ecosystem and when industries begin having faith in them, this will initiate outsourcing with them. A day will come when we can say that we are at par with global institutes. We have a long way to go but nevertheless we are seeing the change.

How would you wish the associations and collaborations to work together to help create sustainable and quality education that focuses not only on excellence but also access and inclusion? Any reforms you would wish to see? Any areas AIU and SIU is already working on which will contribute to this development?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: The AIU continuously works and contributes towards the development of the higher education sector through a number of policy dialogues, research and reports. During pandemic it also helped in the capacity building of teachers and students for their professional development. Recently, AIU and QEDEX, a Subsidiary of QASPIR, UK have launched an Online Professional Development Platform for professional Development and upskilling of Faculty members of our higher education institutions on a continuous basis. The online courses also provide training to the teachers to deal with the challenges of online education specially to improve its effectiveness and relevance.

As far as reforms are concerned, the National Education Policy 2020 has cited a series of reforms at structural, pedagogical and policy level to improve the access, relevance and quality of higher education system in the country. These reforms tend to provide effective solutions to introduce autonomy, independence, transparency, quality and excellence in the higher education system of the country. An inclusive learning solution, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized by providing them the quality education is being promoted. With a rapid increase of mobile/internet users in India, which is expected to reach 85% households by 2024, technology is enabling ubiquitous access and personalization of education even in the remotest parts of the country.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: With all the networks and collaborations what is important is how it benefits the last person, it is not just for the elites especially in a country like ours where there is so much diversity with urban and rural divide and regional divide you need to see how the higher education reaches the last person. I think it has all to do with technology and online education and we need to develop a platform which is also accessible by the rural youth as well. Even though we teach online but it does not reach all the rural/vulnerable areas therefore the internet, good bandwidth and infrastructure is important whether at school or higher education level. At SIU we have adopted 22 villages where we educate young girls around the university campus. Can a university really look at providing this kind of access even if it is online to the neighbouring villages and youth in the neighbouring villages no matter which institute? Can SIU provide skill-based education to enhance employability? These are things we are actually working on in three of our campuses in Pune, Nagpur and Hyderabad which is surrounded by a population which requires skill based education to generate employability so we are working with the local community and villagers and trying to provide access and skill based courses.

In 10 years, what would you wish to be the key contributions for INIE and AIU and SIU in India and globally?

Dr. Pankaj Mittal: The INIE will be a membership-based autonomous consortium aimed at creating a strong cohort of educators and administrators experienced in the field of international education. Through research, collaborative projects, capacity building, policy advocacy and networking it will offer its members the following opportunities:

1. Strengthened understanding on the international dimension of higher education
2. Dialogue with member universities, government and other international organizations engaged with the development, management and promotion of internationalization of higher education, and opportunities to collaborate effectively with them.
3. Research based contributions to policy on higher education at the university, state, national and international level
4. Learning and scholarship on the understanding, appreciation and respect for diversity as the foundation for a world that is safer, more peaceful and nurturing of wellbeing for all.
5. Extensive opportunities for national and international networking
6. Mentoring of universities less experienced in internationalization
7. Holding workshops, conferences, leadership retreats.
8. Opportunity for advanced training and development through seminars, workshops, conferences.
9. Setting uniform standards for organizational (functional, administrative, academic and cultural) and systemic (economic and financial) preparedness.
AIU is wandering into various areas to assist the member universities in reaching their true potential. The AIU is also completely autonomizing its functions and creating portals like AIU Admission Portal, AIU Job Portal and AIU Collaboration Portal for its member universities. The AIU equivalence portal has already streamlined the equivalence process in which the students have to apply for equivalence online, make fee payment online and get online downloadable equivalence certificate. The AIU is also embarking upon many research areas including eligible enrolment ratio, student development index, philanthropic solutions for higher education, internationalization etc.

Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar: I think INIE as a concept was born in Symbiosis, though Dr. Pankaj Mittal spoke to the NAFSA CEO and she also discussed the same. I think like minded people also discuss like minded things. Both Dr. Pankaj and I are very passionate about internationalisation. We were discussing the same things separately with Dr. Esther Brimmer, Executive Director & CEO, NAFSA - while I discussed it with Esther 4 years ago and Dr. Pankaj discussed it last year. I think the whole objective is to make INIE a reality of higher education in our country making it the best in the world. I think we are striving our level best to create a wonderful platform for not just Indian universities but global partners also. INIE should spread its wings to the neighbouring countries or at least to the SAARC countries so they can benefit from it.
Transforming the way we associate

European Association for International Education (EAIE)

— Mr. Leonard Engel
Even under the best of circumstances, change is notoriously difficult. If we add in the confounding conditions of a global health emergency, deep financial setbacks and sustained social disruption, the need for change becomes both urgent and fraught with complexity. Such is our reality around the world in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This extraordinary global event has had profound implications for many sectors, not least of which international higher education, fundamentally reliant as it is on connections between individuals and direct, personal engagement.

When confronting obstacles of the magnitude now facing the international higher education community, it has perhaps never been more important for associations to adopt innovative approaches to the work of associating – a word which, taken literally, simply refers to connecting in meaningful ways. Indeed, the European Association for International Education (EAIE) is now being called upon to help our community of stakeholders to overcome isolation, deal with sustained uncertainty, and both understand and adjust to potentially permanent changes in the ways we think about and do our work as international higher education professionals. To address these vital concerns, the EAIE has been focusing on a series of initiatives aimed at engaging, empowering and inspiring the communities we serve in ways that speak as effectively as possible to both the moment at hand and the longer-term road ahead of us.

**Overcoming isolation**

Since its establishment in 1989, one of the most important contributions of the EAIE has been the way it has enabled the development of a true sense of community among international higher education professionals across Europe, perhaps most obviously in the convening of the Annual EAIE Conference and Exhibition. In recent years, the conference has stood out as a major event on the global international education calendar, bringing together some 6,000 individuals from within Europe and beyond to learn, debate and network, as well as to celebrate and advance all aspects of the work that frames our field. In 2020, the lack of opportunity to gather physically for this always highly-anticipated professional development and networking experience was the most visible evidence of a wider phenomenon of physical disconnection in our community.

To overcome these obstacles, the EAIE worked quickly to develop a series of online mechanisms with the specific goal of fostering a real sense of connection. Less than a month after widespread travel bans and work-at-home regulations were put into place across much of Europe, the EAIE launched its Community Moments webcast series. The series features live, monthly, 30-minute episodes that are focused on a specific and timely topic of broad interest to international higher education professionals. A guest expert offers their insights and responds to questions from the online audience, while the webcast chat box simultaneously offers participants wide-ranging opportunities to exchange professional perspectives, personal insights and resource links in a dynamic and informal fashion. The EAIE Community Summit – offered first in June 2020 and again in March 2021 – took this idea of short yet substantive community learning and engagement experiences and expanded it into a two-day, four-session format, organised around a specific theme, and with additional opportunities for peer learning not featured in the Community Moments series. The June 2020 Community Summit explored “The year ahead,” as we wrapped up the tumultuous 2019-2020 academic year and turned full attention to the start of 2020-2021. The 2021 iteration of the Community Summit considered “The impact imperative,” in light of the ongoing and urgent need for international education professionals to understand and enact impactful internationalisation in a rapidly changing context.

Finally, the need to forego the in-person annual conference in 2020 pushed the EAIE into truly new territory with respect to online community engagement in the form of the EAIE Community Exchange, which took place in October 2020. A rich array of topics and speakers, distinct session formats, live and pre-recorded content delivery, and participant networking opportunities came together in a vibrant and dynamic three-day programme that showcased the EAIE community at its absolute best: smart, energetic, resilient and committed.

“**When confronting obstacles of the magnitude now facing the international higher education community, it has perhaps never been more important for associations to adopt innovative approaches to the work of associating – a word which, taken literally, simply refers to connecting in meaningful ways.”**
While everyone acknowledges that there is nothing like a face-to-face experience, the last year has taught us that there are ways to bring the EAIE community together remotely that foster a genuine sense of connection and support. Ideally, we will carry these lessons forward with us as the barriers to physical isolation come down in the coming months: community matters and finding innovative ways to “associate” with one another will remain salient.

**Dealing with uncertainty**

Another fundamental concern of the last year has been how to manage the high levels of uncertainty enveloping the working lives of our members and stakeholders. To address this, the EAIE has been placing a high priority on new knowledge development and dissemination. For example, in 2020, we conducted two major surveys to gather insights into key issues affecting the international higher education landscape across Europe. The first survey helped clarify the extent and nature of the immediate developments surrounding the pandemic and resulted in the March 2020 Coping with COVID-19 report. The second survey focused on how exchange mobility was being affected in the 2020-2021 academic year by pandemic-related developments. That work resulted in the delivery of three snapshot reports in early 2021: one on exchange mobility within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), a second on exchange mobility with non-EHEA partners, and a third looking at compulsory mobility and alternatives to mobility. The EAIE has long been interested in providing data-driven insights in order to sharpen key discussions in our field, and the unpredictable and fast-moving events of the last year have only strengthened those needs and interests.

Meanwhile, the many online EAIE events this year that have brought together hundreds of individuals from across Europe and around the world have offered the association an unprecedented “listening tour” of concerns and “hot topics” of relevance to our community. Careful attention and analysis of these inputs has served (and will continue) to inform our knowledge base about what professionals in our field are looking for to gain a firm foothold in their work at this very uncertain time.

**Thriving**

Successfully finding our way through uncharted territory requires mechanisms to help us understand the nature of the changes around us and resources to help us adjust to these new circumstances. The EAIE’s approach has involved a range of responses, including expansive and active listening, working to honour the core needs of our community to engage with and learn from one another, and piloting new ways to support and sustain Europe’s international higher education professionals.

What lies at the heart of this work? First and foremost is compassion. The EAIE’s members are real people, individuals who over the last year have been dealing with extraordinary circumstances. The institutions they work for and the communities and countries in which they live are also facing daunting challenges and hard choices. This is a difficult time. So, it’s a moment that also requires courage and stamina. Change is not easy or comfortable, but each of us, the EAIE included, will need to continue to experiment with new ways of doing things and bring others along with us. Finally, associations like the EAIE must undertake thoughtful and constant environmental scanning to keep us properly connected to the needs of our community and alert to developments in the broader world around us.

Ultimately, if “associating” means to connect meaningfully, then our current circumstances require us to learn to associate in novel ways. The EAIE has been able to take important steps toward such innovative ways of associating with one another as we weather the tail end of this crisis and beyond.

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**Perspective from Netherlands**

Mr. Leonard Engel

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Mr. Leonard Engel
Successfully supporting international education leaders through the pandemic
Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA)

— Dr. Darla K. Deardorff
The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) is the leading professional organization for university leaders responsible for internationalizing their institutions. In February 2020, AIEA held its largest ever in-person conference in Washington D.C. USA with nearly 1000 participants from 40+ countries including delegations from such countries as Angola, Brazil, Cambodia, Kazakhstan and Nigeria. Little did participants know that the 2020 AIEA Conference was to be the last in-person conference in the field of international education for months to come.

In March 2020 when the full brunt of the pandemic came crashing down around the world, AIEA quickly organised its first town hall to bring members together and provide a space for members to connect with each other around the pressing issues of the pandemic. AIEA proved to be quite agile in organizing and providing weekly town hall discussions for its members from March 13, 2020 through May 2020. Starting in June 2020, AIEA continued its town hall discussions twice a month through November and will resume monthly town halls from March 2021. These town hall discussions received very positive reviews from members and averaged around 150 participants. Topics addressed included supporting international students, the future of study abroad, finance and international education, navigating the future, and the role of racial and social justice in international education. These were topics proposed and guided by members directly and each of the discussions had robust member participation.

From November 2020 through February 2021, AIEA turned its attention to supporting members through programs that culminated in a very successful online conference on Feb 15-17, 2021 with the theme of “Leading International Education in a New Era: Collaborating for Global Solutions.” Innovative features of this conference included pre-conference online networking meetups starting in January. Six online workshops were also offered to members in January on such topics as designing virtual online learning programs, fostering a data-informed culture to support international education, the future of education abroad, and the role of international educators in racial healing. Participants in the conference itself, which included nearly 700 registrants from 40+ countries, were surprised by intimacy of the conference despite its online nature – this was helped in part through the special social events featuring poet laureate Trapeta Mayson and an outstanding jazz duo known as Acute Inflections, as well as stellar keynotes who included former UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, founder and chairman of Harappa Education Pramath Sinha, Francisco Marmolejo of the Qatar Foundation, visionary university president David Wilson, COVID-19 expert Michael Osterholm in conversation with the Chronicle of Higher Education’s Karin Fischer, and futurist Gary Bolles of Singularity.

In addition to offering town hall discussions, the association was also very responsive to members in quickly developing a new program called Peer Learning Circles, which has also been very well received by members. Through these Peer Learning Circles, small number of members are able to connect with each on a deeper level each month to discuss burning issues often related to the pandemic.

In the midst of the pandemic, AIEA was pleased to partner with two other organisations – the Forum on Education Abroad and EF: Education First – in developing a unique professional development opportunity in conjunction with Nobel Dialogue Week called the Senior Global Leadership Symposium in which teams of university leaders from over 40 universities around the world came together virtual in December to learn from Nobel Laureates and other leaders over a two-day period. It is hoped this program will continue in-person in the future.

While the pandemic has hit all organizations quite hard in regard to finances, AIEA is fortunate to have a financial reserve as well as to have received some funds from the state government to help address the shortfall from the 2021 conference and slightly lower membership numbers. Staff have continued working remotely for the last year and have persevered through the challenges wrought by the pandemic. Now with the vaccination as a gamechanger, there is hope that the worst is over as the world slowly begins to recover from the pandemic.

One of the main needs noted by AIEA members is the desire to network with each other and to have opportunities to learn from and with each other. Some of the “silver linings” of the pandemic is that AIEA members were indeed able to connect with each other in new and different ways through the town hall discussions, the Peer Learning Circles, and the new Senior Global Leadership Symposium, as well as through the series of pre-conference networking events featuring poet laureate Trapeta Mayson and an outstanding jazz duo known as Acute Inflections, as well as stellar keynotes who included former UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova, founder and chairman of Harappa Education Pramath Sinha, Francisco Marmolejo of the Qatar Foundation, visionary university president David Wilson, COVID-19 expert Michael Osterholm in conversation with the Chronicle of Higher Education’s Karin Fischer, and futurist Gary Bolles of Singularity.

AIEA “embraces the opportunities created through this new landscape as it seeks to continue to support and meet its members’ needs in a changed environment.”
meetups. Thus, members had a myriad of ways to connect with each other throughout the year, when in the pre-pandemic world, these connections only took place at the annual conference and then with only those able to attend. Moving forward, AIEA plans to continue to look for new and innovative ways for members to connect with each other in substantive ways. The theme of the 2022 AIEA conference is “Why the Internationalization of Higher Education Matters” and will most likely be an asynchronous hybrid experience for participants.

All in all, AIEA has succeeded quite well in meeting member needs during the pandemic, despite the challenges. In reflecting upon this success, it is important that the association sought out members’ needs and responded with agility in meeting these needs. For new professionals entering the field, it is important to identify organizations that will meet specific professional needs. Further, AIEA members serving in leadership roles were able to step up their efforts in meeting member needs – and this despite the additional strains placed on them in their roles as Senior International Officers guiding their institutions through the pandemic’s impact on institutional international programs.

In looking to the future, AIEA understands that the post-pandemic world will not be a return to the way things had been given the total disruption of the pandemic upon international education. Rather, the association embraces the opportunities created through this new landscape as it seeks to continue to support and meet its members’ needs in a changed environment. To sum up thoughts in looking to the future, here are the collective words of AIEA members who wrote the following poem during the recent 2021 AIEA Annual Conference:

**AIEA Collaborative Poem**

February 15, 2021
Guided by Trapeta Mayson, Poet Laureate of Philadelphia

Oh 2021
I feel anxious, but I embrace the energy that exudes from the souls of those I love
I feel disillusioned, but I embrace opportunities for deepening commitments to global justice
I feel skeptical, but I embrace optimism
Perplexed, but I embrace adventure
Overwhelmed, but I see so many possibilities ahead
I feel amazed, and I embrace the unknown with optimism for its infinite possibilities
I feel hopeful, and I embrace life as it is
Suspicious, but I embrace the possibility that you'll leave me feeling hopeful and in awe

Oh 2021
I feel galvanized, and I embrace growth and new life

Courageous, and I embrace new possibilities
Optimistic, and I embrace change, transition and the unknown

Oh 2021
I feel courageous and I embrace, I embrace, I embrace anyone who will come
Perplexed and overwhelmed, but I embrace daily gratitude and grace
Confused, but I embrace hope
Vulnerable, but I embrace the uncertainty of the road ahead
Eager, and I embrace growth and change

I embrace the uncertain days to come
Overwhelmed, but I am moving forward bravely
I embrace opportunities for intercultural learning both near and far
I embrace the insecurity of what is to come
I embrace hope that we are now better prepared
Who is caring for the caretaker?

I feel eager and I embrace this time of transition
I embrace the future which will bring me closer to the hearts, arms, and physical presence of others, sipping wine and laughing

**Contributors:** Eny Di Iorio, Jewell Winn, Jeff Cohen, Wondwossen Gebreyes, Erich Dietrich, Laura Allen, Sonia Feigenbaum, Penelope Pynes, Sarah Olson, Katy Rosenbaum, Kelsey Prima, Cari Vanderkar, GianMario Besana, Mirian Carballo, Jennifer Evansuk, Thomas Buntru, Megan Francis, Elizabeth Langridge-Noti, Sue Roberts, Christa Olson, Lisa Pawloski, Marko Princevac, Rosalie Richards, Dale LaFleur, Sue Roberts, Charles Reilly and Karen Wachsmuth.

**Dr. Darla K. Deardorff**
Tackling global challenges by promoting South-South-North Partnerships

OBREAL Global

— Dr. Nicolas Patrici and Ms. Elizabeth Colucci

OBREAL Global headquarters are located in the facilities of the hub located at the iconic art nouveau Recinte Modernista Sant Pau de Barcelona. To know a bit more of the history of our building: https://www.santpaubarcelona.org/en/history
1. New paradigms to face global challenges

During the last year, it has become clear that new cooperation paradigms need to be urgently developed. Strategically responding to the challenge posed by the pandemic, OBREAL-Global decided to launch a new approach to connecting its members in Europe, India, Latin America and the Caribbean, the GCC and Africa. Connecting the agendas of these very diverse regions is, for OBREAL-Global, an opportunity to promote innovative approaches to local challenges in the higher education and research sectors with a distinct South-South-North perspective.

2. OBREAL-Global and South-South-North cooperation in focus

‘South-South’ cooperation, defined as an exchange of expertise between governments, organisations and individuals in the global ‘South’, requires a new focus, especially in terms of its relationship to the ‘North’. For OBREAL-Global and its partners, one solution could be placing greater emphasis on South-South-North cooperation, driven by the Higher Education sector. This should entail developing platforms for dialogue that speak to a multiplicity of cultures, advance common understanding and promote a more collaborative and equitable world. South-South-North cooperation must develop an agenda that is equally South and North driven, acknowledges fundamental differences yet celebrates and pursues shared interests, such as the SDGs.

a.) New modalities for connecting South and North higher education networks: The experience of OBREAL Global Observatory

OBREAL Global Observatory, an association of diverse, internationally oriented academic and research institutions, as well as university associations and networks from Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, is currently reconstructing its modes of cooperation to effectively foster and advocate more targeted, responsive and structured S-S-N cooperation. Originally born as an EU project to promote bi-lateral, multi-thematic relations between the EU and Latin America, the Barcelona-based association has evolved its structure and membership to become more globally responsive and inclusive, moving beyond a somewhat antiquated approach of bi-regional cooperation, by which Europe has traditionally divided the world into silos.

OBREAL Global’s mission:

1) Promote dialogue and synergies between governmental, academic and social sectors, taking into account the specificities and heterogeneity of each region around the world;

2) Create cross-regional and truly global, South-South North bridges for enhanced development in the higher education and research sectors, via collaborative multi-regional projects and knowledge production.

While OBREAL Global has over a decade of experience with EU projects that target development cooperation in higher education (such as the Erasmus Mundus Programme, Alfa, Tempus and Erasmus+), it is presently challenged to find appropriate funding schemes that support S-S-N collaboration out of principle. When one takes the EU programmes, they do offer possibilities for global collaboration between diverse regions (the Erasmus+ Capacity Building for HE, for example, which is one of the few programmes globally that supports S-S-N cooperation in the framework of regional development). While such funding has had a tremendous influence on universities in partner regions of Europe across the globe, extremely few cross-regional projects are selected, a product of complex funding instruments which do not facilitate multi-regional approaches.

These limitations are not just limited to the EU but Africa, India and Latin America, also share many common priorities, yet trilateral or bi-lateral India-Latin America / India-Africa higher education cooperation is neither politically visible nor systematically financed, either by the South or the North. Past initiatives such as those financed by the BRICS seemed to have faded as the political spheres of influence have evolved.

Very few institutions speak of multi-regional alliances and approaches to meet Europe’s recovery objectives or development cooperation goals. This reality has its ramifications in the way we work academically on student and research mobility flows and on the general shape of development cooperation processes. Taking the example of the BRICS, some universities have worked bi-laterally in research, however at the level of university associations and networks, cooperation tends to be relegated to separate circles. This neither reflects the internationalisation agenda of many Latin American and Indian universities (as the example of SIU shows), which are increasingly diversifying globally, nor does it reflect the common challenges that regions share. What is more, what was once presumed as a linguistic barrier to cooperation between certain regions, is now more easily circumvented, as is extensive and costly travel (a potentially positive post-effect of the pandemic). With the growing emphasis on contributing the SDG through higher education, S-S-N multi-regional partnerships should be the way forward, embraced by financial instruments, development banks and other international partners and donors.

OBREAL Global is attempting to move the compass on
this topic by developing regional ‘Chapters’. These Chapters are driven by members of OBREAL Global, many of which are important regional higher education associations. Each have developed its own work plan based on the dynamics of the region and its needs. An Inter-Chapter Board promotes dialogue between the Chapters and defines joint projects and work groups.

b.) OBREAL Global Chapters

During 2020, OBREAL-Global has re-organized itself through the consolidation of Chapters in India, Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, each with a concrete work plan and projects that support both local, national and regional agendas as well as global and inter-regional perspectives. It is believed that these Chapters, driven by important associations, networks and institutions will form the foundation of a more meaningful and substantiated global dialogue with tangible objectives and paths for cooperation.

The African Chapter, chaired by the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the Southern African Regional University Association (SARUA) has prioritised internationalisation from the perspective of the South, as well as higher education data collection for policy making. The Latin American Chapter, chaired by the Colombian Association of Universities and the Montevideo University Group of Universities (AUGM), with the support of the National University Association of Mexico (ANUIES) is working on the digitalisation agenda of the region as a mean to promote internationalisation of the curricula of Latin American universities. Both agendas, the African and the Latin American one, are linked to the Indian Chapter, led and chaired by SIU and supported by the Asian Institute of Design in Bangalore. This Chapter is collaborating with OBREAL-Members in India (IITM, NITK, IISC, amongst others) and in Europe (KTH, the University of Barcelona, Montpellier University) on three specific projects:

1) Promoting research cooperation on strategic topics
2) Promoting the development of skills and digitalisation
3) Promoting internationalisation policies at HEI

In connection with India’s push for the internationalisation of higher education, the Indian Chapter of OBREAL-Global has also been acting as a bridge between regions, positioning itself as a protagonist and leader in promoting South-South-North cooperation as a response to the challenges of the pandemic.

c.) Way Forward

S-S-N collaboration requires dynamic higher education platforms that seek new approaches to connect networks and associations in different parts of the world. This is currently being done by organizations like OBREAL Global and its Chapters in South America, India, The Caribbean, Africa and Central America. The OBREAL-Global approach implies both a challenge and an opportunity: While it is important that stakeholders in the South and the North chart their own path together, irrespective of external funding, the international partner/donor community should recognize and fund truly South-South-North multi-regional solutions to meet today’s challenges. 

“During the last year, it has become clear that new cooperation paradigms need to be urgently developed. Strategically responding to the challenge posted by the pandemic, OBREAL-Global decided to launch a new approach to connecting its members in Europe, India, Latin America and the Caribbean, the GCC and Africa. Connecting the agendas of these very diverse regions is, for OBREAL-Global, an opportunity to promote innovative approaches to local challenges in the higher education and research sectors with a distinct South-South-North perspective.”

Dr. Nicolas Patrici and Ms. Elizabeth K. Colucci
Resilience and Adaptation to Rebuild the Global Village

The Case of CONAHEC (Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration)

— Mr. Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez and Mr. Sean Manley-Casimir
As associations/networks/consortia, we are bridge-builders in the international education ecosystem; we maintain, expand, and create opportunities for collaboration. By working together, we can become promoters of constructive symbiotic relationships. Let us rebuild our global village through mutual understanding and respect, solidarity, and collaboration.

In-person mobility as a catalyst for networking and intercultural development. However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, we quickly realised the urgency of finding ways for these activities to continue effectively without the need for travel.

CONAHEC has the advantage of being a small and agile organisation. To keep serving our members during these trying times, we adapted all our programs in the following ways. First, we started working in the late spring and early summer of 2020 to design a virtual exchange program for students. With high levels of uncertainty as to if and how universities would resume instruction in the Fall, we asked our member institutions to consider the possibility of hosting international students in-person and/or virtually. Taking advantage of our platform, and of the fact that all our member institutions were forced to shift the entirety of their courses towards online forms of instructions, we started offering students the possibility of enrolling in online classes both at their home institution and at another institution from outside their country.

Using a similar approach, our traditional faculty exchange program was also modified to consider both in-person and virtual formats depending on factors such as preference or travel restrictions. To make that happen, we joined forces with one of our partner associations—the American Higher Education Alliance (AHEA)—to promote collaboration among faculty members in different institutions from different countries who use their technology platform called CollaboratED to jointly design and deliver courses benefiting from the input of international partners and leveraging these robust online resources to offer their students comprehensive international perspectives and unique opportunities to interact with international peers in their academic fields of interest. For this program, we remain...
focused on finding and matching faculty members whose interests align with each other and who have the potential to foster international collaboration projects between their institutions. However, we are also adapting the model to be supported by technology so that it becomes easier for the faculty to find partners and collaborate, becomes sustainable as a reliable model over time, and generates a broader impact.

Regarding our events, we had planned to hold our 20th annual conference as an in-person event that would bring together members of the international education community for a gathering in beautiful Mérida, México. After the pandemic made that impossible as it did for most organisations, we were faced with the option of postponing the conference or transforming it into a virtual event. We opted for the latter and decided, once again, to join forces with another long-term partner organisation: the Mexican Association for International Education (AMPEI), and hold our conferences jointly in a 100% virtual format.

Main Challenges

So far, the three mobility programs have been successful. However, admittedly, the overall number of participants in the virtual modality for all of these is smaller than the in-person levels we enjoyed pre-pandemic. There are a combination of contributing factors. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the sudden and forced shift in individuals’ and institutions’ priorities. The pandemic has caused so much disruption in everyone’s personal lives that activities such as participating in an exchange program lose priority. Also important is the issue of access. Technology might be seen as an accessible and equitable means when compared to traveling. Still, it is incorrect to assume that everyone has the resources (finances, infrastructure, knowledge, equipment, etc.) to access and effectively use this technology. Lastly, beyond the skepticism about virtual education delivery in the national contexts, virtual internationalisation is also seen as a very challenging option, raising important questions and considerations about quality and completeness. After decades of efforts to highlight the importance of traveling abroad to gain intercultural competencies, the key challenge introduced by this sudden shift to virtual internationalisation is the possibility of generating similar educational impact and adequately compelling human connections through these types of cooperation programs.

The same can be said about the ‘virtual’ conference format. While our experience was successful, attracting the participation of over 250 attendees who reported high levels of satisfaction with the event, financially, it was certainly not as profitable as past in-person editions. As a small, not-for-profit organisation, CONAHEC’s programs and expenses are covered with funds from two primary sources: membership fees and its annual conference. We expect that in the near future, just as many other conferences will do, our conference, if not entirely virtual, will at least adopt a hybrid virtual/in-person model. Moving forward with these events needs to be accompanied by a rethinking of the financial model and adapting contents and formats. Particularly during this past year, people have been overexposed to online content in the form of meetings, webinars, symposiums, and conferences making it difficult to generate attention and differentiate.

Final Thoughts

In closing, we would like to emphasize the importance of the attitude an organisation takes when facing a crisis. It is easy to fall into a downward spiral when challenges seem to pile up one after another; however, as organisations, we need to be flexible and agile to respond to each challenge. Most importantly, we need to institutionalise our efforts and responses in a way that can generate knowledge and a sense of institutional resilience. Even though we have served many institutions for over two decades, CONAHEC remains a very small organisation of just one full-time and two part-time employees. With limited human resources at a time when individuals are also being limited by insurmountable personal challenges brought by the pandemic, it is understandably challenging to survive, let alone to adapt and transform. Yet, by working together with our members and allies, we will continue to offer valuable opportunities to enhance international cooperation among higher education institutions.

Throughout history, humankind has leveraged crisis to create opportunity by resetting old practices and transforming ourselves, our institutions, and our organisations. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Although as of this writing we are not beyond it yet, it is already possible to reflect on various lessons this crisis has taught. Perhaps the most important is the realisation that global hyper-interconnectedness makes us vulnerable as a whole; a disease starting in one place has brought the entire world to a standstill. With complete disregard for our human created divisions, this virus permeated all boundaries: ideological, religious, economic, cultural, and geographic. But our globalised fragility is also a reminder of the importance of working together to solve our common problems. Globally connected, locally engaged? Local solutions to global problems? Those are not optional anymore. Country-first isolationist agendas and discourses will not help our societies thrive. No matter how powerful and resourceful an institution or even a country is, it is impossible to isolate one from the world.

As associations/networks/consortia, our role as bridge-builders becomes even more important than ever. International collaboration among higher education institutions serves a crucial role in maintaining, expanding, and
creating opportunities for practical engagement in international relationships in support of global prosperity. Together we can purposefully rebuild our global village through mutual understanding and respect, solidarity, and collaboration. It is precisely by fostering these values, and in moving from mere promoters of networking opportunities to promoters of constructive symbiotic relationships where our associations will remain crucial drivers in the international education ecosystem.

Mr. Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez and Mr. Sean Manley-Casimir
Living mobility in times of immobility
Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

— Ms. Olivia Parczyk
As an organisation that strives for the enrichment of society through international students, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and all the international students we stand for have faced their fair share of challenges in a pandemic that limits mobility worldwide. These challenges came in many shapes and sizes, but they all were issues that we never would have considered in pre-pandemic times. Initially hoping that we would simply need to come up with some quick-fix solutions in order to bridge the short time, until everything would go back to normal, we too came to the realisation that putting out urgent fires and treating the symptoms of this new problem would not be sufficient. Instead, we would need to find long-term solutions to treat the problem in its core – otherwise it would just be a new label “adapting to a new normal”.

One issue that everyone certainly faced was a significant drop of motivation. It is hard to stay motivated when there is no indicator of when (and sometimes if) everything will return to normal. This hit us significantly as mobility, which was the essence of our work was practically annihilated. Not only are we deeply involved in student mobility, but our motto ‘Mobility is a Lifestyle’ also applies to all our volunteers. ESN is a network that thrives from physical interaction, be it between our volunteers and international students, or simply network-internal. Our volunteers from 42 countries have always embodied the concept of mobility, always been on the road for our international events and are deeply connected within the network. An abrupt halt to all these activities, which are important aspect of our work, has also taken a toll on the motivation of our volunteers and on their very lifestyles. While we tried our best to adapt to the situation by hosting online games, online workshops and sometimes simply online hangouts, we all have temporarily given up an essential part of our life.

Besides ourselves, we cannot forget the roughly 350,000 international students with whom our volunteers are in touch with every year. Mobility during higher education is often a dream students have been planning for years, and now either getting it completely taken away or ending up the mobility program in an unexpected situation in a foreign country is far from easy. Our volunteers always make it their personal mission to offer maximum support to the incoming students however; in the early months of the pandemic for the first time it happened that, we could not support the incoming students that too in a situation when it was most required.

Not only every country in Europe, but also every university in Europe dealt very differently with the pandemic. Though some of the universities managed to display exemplary conduct, there are many universities where international students have reported unsatisfactory treatment. With this larger deviation factor between countries and universities, in addition to the fact that our volunteers could not personally interact with all international students, this was incredibly difficult to understand and determine their individual needs and determine how we could help them. In an attempt to assess the situation, ESN launched one of the first larger-scale surveys on the impact of the pandemic on the situation of international students in Europe back in April, and published the results not long after. We hope that this survey authentically reflects the needs of international students and enables their voices to be heard by their higher education institutes.

The latter point in the survey highlights that the struggle that we faced while dealing with the risks and limitation during these days, cannot be avoided, but at the very least, they can be transformed into opportunities. One of the largest opportunities for our organization (together with and led by the new generation) undoubtedly was the shift towards digital solutions for an abundance of problems. While the surprising flip to on-line training became rocky, to mention the least, it confirmed its ability tons in advance than it would have without the pandemic, and the overall shift to a digital life has also fundamentally changed the mindset of the population at large. While so many areas still need a lot of work in order to assure quality, in 10 years we will be much farther than we would have been without the sudden urge for change. And once we got used to online alternatives we became vigilant about the advantages that made them superior in some aspects for example - operating online is more environmentally sustainable and saves significant amounts of time, money and other resources. Though we cannot believe our community running entirely on-line post-pandemic as this will no longer permit us to follow our mission and values to the extent that we deem necessary, but we surely see the potential for more consideration of online alternatives considering their cost-benefit ratio.

Finally, we had more meetings than ever before due to zero travel time and expenses as most of us are working from home. Further, we do not have to be stuck in commute every day. Scheduling meetings has become so much more efficient which allowed us to significantly elevate our collaboration with stake-
holders by increasing the interactions. And on top of that, these circumstances increased our reach far beyond the borders of Europe. While we already had worked outside Europe especially in the last few years before the pandemic, we now could easily communicate with the entire globe. The positive results from this change are ample, but the best example for this article is probably the fact that right now, we as a European student organisation are writing an article for Symbiosis eXpress IntlEd, a magazine published by an Indian institution.

At the end of the day we of course wish to resume our work in a way that is as close to pre-pandemic times as possible. However, we do believe that our core aim, to achieve unity on diversity, does not need to be put on hold. The best way to meet these trying times is by working with what we have, and after a full year in these extraordinary circumstances we fortunately discovered that there is, in fact, quite a lot that can be achieved.

Ms. Olivia Parczyk
Just do it. The IIENetwork’s Moment of Growth in a Pandemic
Institute of International Education Network (IIENetwork)

— Ms. Clare Overmann and Mr. Vivek Mansukhani
The global COVID-19 pandemic has upended all sectors in all corners of the world and, although it has been one of the greatest challenges for our association, it has also stimulated the most fruitful moment of growth in our membership’s history.

The Institute of International Education is one of the world’s oldest and largest non-profit organizations working in international education and exchange. Among the many scholarship, training, and exchange programs we are known for administering. We also maintain a membership association called the IIE Network comprising of 1450+ institutional members and 9000+ individuals, the two decade-old network prides itself in being a dependable resource, a convener, and a source of leadership for the field of international education. Over the years, the IIENetwork had settled into a comfortable groove, and we started to ask the question: “What more can we be doing?” Surveying our members and engaging in strategic planning processes put More Engagement, Updated Benefits, and More Leadership as top goals on our wish list. But on the wish list they remained, often being put on the back burner for another day.

That day came for us on March 13, 2020 when the pandemic became a stark reality, we all started working from home, travel was halted, and the field of international education – along with every other sector - went into crisis. The IIENetwork was needed more than ever and we quickly identified several key ways to help our members.

Data and Benchmarking

IIE’s Research, Evaluation, and Learning team launched a COVID-19 snapshot series that issued rapid-fire surveys to the U.S. higher education community – many of them IIENetwork members – and provided periodic updates on emerging trends and statistics from the field. When some institutions were considering transitioning to a hybrid model, for instance, it was helpful to understand what other institutions were already doing. These timely data updates were a key resource for our members to be able to make decisions and provide updates to their campus leaders.

Webinars and Small Group Discussions

We developed a webinar series to provide our members with the information and tools to lead their own institutions and organizations through the pandemic. We showcased our members’ innovations, highlighted diverse perspectives, and continuously adapted our topics to meet the changing needs of our members. In addition to webinars, we created a small group discussion series that provided a safe space for 10-15 members to talk candidly about some of the challenges that arose, especially during the beginning of the pandemic. Throughout 2020, we engaged more than 5,700 participants from 106 countries in our webinar series, and continue to offer the series today.

Direct Benefits

Understanding the unprecedented challenges on member campuses, IIE launched its largest Emergency Student Fund initiative to date, offering $2 million in stipends to international students studying at U.S. member institutions so they could continue their educational experience.

The crisis presented us with an opportunity to take action, to stop thinking and start doing. We did not have a prescribed schedule or a grand plan that we were following, but, like many organizations, just did what was needed. Ultimately, we were able to advance many of our strategic goals for the membership – more engagement, more benefits, more leadership – by responding in the only way we could during a crisis: to respond to member needs.

Our ambition is to build this rapidly to become a truly global network that brings together individuals and institutions in the higher education space, bound by a common mission and vision to leverage the power of international education for the benefit of all. The pandemic has highlighted more than ever before the need for an interconnected world that shares resources, best practices and opportunities. It will continue to be our endeavor to convene and coalesce thought leadership and innovative practices in higher education across the globe and make it available as widely as possible.

Ms. Clare Overmann and Mr. Vivek Mansukhani
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Internationalisation of Higher Education

Inviting Contributions for Articles

Deadline to Submit: June 1st, 2021 (Tuesday)

We look forward to your contribution!

For further details CLICK HERE

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