



AIEA ISSUE BRIEF

DECEMBER 2015

Managing from the Middle: Eight Tips for New International Education Administrators for Working with Faculty

Nick J. Gozik • *Boston College*





INTRODUCTION

One of the principal challenges for any senior international officer (SIO) is to work with faculty who do not see the benefits of international initiatives and programs. Skepticism about the value of internationalization and/or uncertainty about how this applies to a given faculty member's work may make faculty members reluctant to respond to overtures from SIOs to become engaged. Such reluctance may be compounded by distrust of administrators. All of this may come as a surprise to SIOs who hold advanced degrees, and especially those who have tenure, and thus are best positioned to relate to their faculty colleagues. It is therefore critical for SIOs, whether they are primarily administrators or faculty members, to understand faculty members' positions and priorities, as well as to develop strategies for collaborating with all constituents, including faculty, to effectively internationalize a campus.

EIGHT TIPS FOR NEW INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS FOR WORKING WITH FACULTY

1. Manage from the middle

Perhaps the biggest revelation for an incoming senior-level administrator is that s/he may be charged with many essential responsibilities, yet have very little direct authority over those needed to carry out the work. Even with support staff, successful programs rely heavily on the goodwill of others. To be effective one must manage "from the middle" (Boomgaarden, 2008), which entails learning how to persuade and entice others to get on board, rather than relying on demands or "sticks" which may not in fact exist. Taking this stance requires actively listening, establishing a clear plan, gaining buy-in, developing a thick skin, and assessing the results.

2. Listen, listen, and listen some more

In ascending the administrative hierarchy, it is easy to become accustomed to doing much of the talking during meetings. An effective SIO learns how to truly hear others' concerns and thoughts. This can be accomplished informally by setting up a series of lunches or coffee meetings with colleagues from various units. In a more structured sense, either existing or newly created advisory committees can serve as sounding boards; with these, it is important not to simply present to the group, but instead allow for a meaningful exchange of ideas. Additionally, one can convene focus groups or a discussion series, with a predetermined set of questions.



3. Work with a faculty advisory group

To ensure that faculty members have a voice over the long run, work with a faculty advisory group. Such groups may take a variety of forms such as a “committee” or “advisory board” and accordingly give members varying levels of authority and responsibility. Numerous questions should be asked before establishing a group, including: Will faculty participants have voting rights or be limited to offering advice and recommendations? Will the committee report to the SIO or be responsible to some other person or entity, such as a faculty governing body? How will faculty participants be selected and how long will they serve? How will meeting notes be kept and shared with those not present? Who will set the agenda? It can be difficult to disband a committee or advisory group once it has been formed, and so it is essential to think through the details in advance before committing to any one model.

4. Develop a strategy

Before implementing any new ideas, an SIO needs to work with a variety of campus constituents to craft a proposal that outlines international priorities (Brewer et al., 2015; Childress, 2009). Faculty members must play a role in each stage of the preparation of such a plan, from initial discussions to implementation and assessment. They can offer creative input, as well as a grounded sense of what is possible from the standpoint of their respective curricula, classroom practices, and students’ expressed needs. Throughout the process of developing a plan, an SIO needs to ensure that any strategy begins by considering the institutional mission and goals, while also taking into account the interests and needs of staff and students. At the same time, one should keep in mind the feasibility of projects and available resources; initiatives may need to be prioritized and implemented in stages.

5. Gain buy-in

Like any group, faculty will present a range of personalities and interests. Championing and showcasing the work of faculty who are supportive will be important and can be accomplished through a variety of vehicles including publications, awards, and presentations. For the less zealous, who may be more indifferent than resistant, it helps to find common ground. One strategy



is to demonstrate to faculty where the “value added” is with international efforts, or in other words what they faculty and their students can gain from certain initiatives. It is also essential to take into account how faculty motivations differ by discipline/profession and campus-specific reward structures. Spending time by talking with faculty within and across departments can reveal which arguments will be most salient to specific groups of faculty.

6. Address the critics

Faculty members may express legitimate concerns which need to be addressed, either individually or within a group. Being receptive can allow an SIO to diffuse any of the harshness that may come with criticism. And while none of us enjoy negative feedback, taking into account potential weaknesses can assure the success of a project and save valuable time and resources. Some critics may want to block a new initiative, possibly because they do not see a need for change or have alternative agendas in mind. It can be disheartening to realize that it is not possible to gain buy-in from every single individual. Thus, when all attempts at listening and resolution have been attempted, and it has been determined that an initiative is worth pursuing after due diligence, one’s best strategy is to remain calm and positive, tune out the distraction, and stay focused on the end goals (Harvard Business School, 2004).

7. Provide opportunities for faculty development

Although faculty members are experts in their own fields and disciplines, this does not mean that they have the tools required for implementing international initiatives. A political scientist may know a considerable amount about the impact of globalization in a given world region, yet this does not mean that she will necessarily be prepared to aid international students in acclimating to her classroom. Some may balk at the idea of being “trained”, as they are used to being the purveyors of knowledge, and so it is vital to provide a space in which faculty can learn, while also be respected. Having faculty present during sessions can build trust with other faculty who are more likely to listen to their colleagues. It can also be useful to partner with others on campus with pertinent areas of proficiency, whether it is in



counseling, health and safety, outcomes assessment, or curriculum development, among others, to offer faculty development sessions.

8. Assess the results

Lastly, it is critical to assess initiatives on an ongoing basis and not to be afraid of adapting strategies as warranted. Assessment can take a more structured approach, starting with a plan which, for instance, gauges the extent student learning outcomes have been identified and are being realized. Assessment can take place at a number of levels, beginning with the institutional internationalization plan and descending to the level of individual departments/offices, programs, and students (Gozik, 2015). At the same time, an SIO should not forget that regular and informal check-ins with colleagues are equally as constructive for maintaining buy-in and gaining information required for adapting internationalization plans.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Faculty are valuable allies for internationalization when engaged in productive and meaningful ways. Indeed, they are essential; they take on the lion's share in providing students with an international education. The discussion above demonstrates the necessity for SIOs to reflect on how faculty members can be brought into the planning, implementation, and assessment of internationalization efforts. Given that most SIOs exercise little direct authority and must rely on the cooperation and generosity of their colleagues to accomplish key tasks, it is all the more vital that they develop political and communication skills, and perhaps a bit of salesmanship, to ensure that they can effectively facilitate the internationalization of their colleges and universities.



REFERENCES

Boomgaarden, D. (2008). "Managing from the Middle". *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Nov. 26.

Brewer, E., Charles, H., Ferguson, A. (2004). *Strategic Planning for Internationalization in Higher Education*. Accessed 7 Sept 2015. www.aiea.org.

Childress, L. K. (2010). *The twenty-first century university: Developing faculty engagement in internationalization* (Vol. 32). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Gozik, N. (2015). Closing the Loop: Linking Stages of the Assessment Cycle. In Savicki, V. & Brewer, E. (Eds.) *Assessing Study Abroad Theory, Tools and Practice*. (pp. 57-79). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

[Harvard Business School Press](#). (2004). *Dealing With Difficult People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.



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

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

ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATORS
PO Box 90404, Duke University
Durham, NC 27708, 919.668.1928
aiea@duke.edu • www.aieaworld.org

