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**Listserv Summary: International Education “Provocateurs”**

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**May 5, 2014**

An inquiry was made to the AIEA Listserv asking members to send names and affiliations of “provocateurs” in international education: colleagues who consistently challenge us to look at our field in new ways, question assumptions, and occasionally make controversial assertions.

**Summary of responses:**

John D. Heyl provided the following summary of responses, also available at [www.ieleaders.net](http://www.ieleaders.net).

**IE Provocateurs**

**John D. Heyl**

**IELeaders.net**

Every field that aspires to status as a discipline must exhibit a range of shared consensus. This includes: What questions are important for us to study? What is our agreed upon terminology? What are our shared standards of measurement? This consensus usually also includes some agreement on what counts as milestones in the development of the discipline itself.

But just as a discipline requires a degree of consensus to tackle problems posed in the field in a coherent fashion, so do disciplines need *provocateurs* – some would call them *contrarians* - who look at the field in new ways. Such figures are the heroes of modern science, those who challenged the received consensus and (eventually) set the whole discipline in another direction. In my own field of modern German history, such was the impact of a little book by William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town* (1965). This book sent German historians (including myself) into local archives to reveal a different face of the Nazi era than the "totalitarian" label, so widely accepted at the time, suggested.

In international education (IE), like other fields in the social sciences, the lines are not so clear. It is hardly surprising, then, that the term "provocateur " means different things to different people. Some consider those who create something new - a new study abroad consortium, a new set of institutional policies, a new collaboration with a hitherto neglected partner institution abroad - to be provocateurs. These colleagues are certainly innovators. But they are not necessarily *provocateurs* - although they may be that too. Likewise, some are extraordinarily effective leader/managers who consistently inspire their staffs to achieve great things. These may be the builders of "centers of excellence" on a campus that serve as models for other SIOs. Finally, I realized that “IE provocateur,” for most AIEA members queried, did not include college and university presidents, some of whom have been true *provocateurs* in our field.

## The List

So here are the results of an informal survey of AIEA members on who should be included in this important club.

It will not surprise that two names topped the list. **Michael Woolf**, Deputy President for Strategic Development at CAPA International Education and coordinator of CAPA's Occasional Seminars/Papers was recognized as a colleague who regularly challenges us to rethink the assumptions in our field, especially in study abroad. **Hans de Wit**, Professor of Internationalization of Higher Education at the University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Director of the Centre for Higher Education Internationalization at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy, and longtime editor of the *Journal of Studies in International Education*, joined Mike at the top of the list.

Both Mike Woolf and Hans de Wit have questioned the very way we talk about our profession. In 2011 Hans (with Uwe Brandenburg, who also appears on this list) wrote that SIOs were losing their innovative edge by clinging to "traditional concepts" that are inadequate to a rapidly changing world. He has repeatedly cautioned international educators against simply re-labeling familiar processes to give them a veneer of freshness and innovation. Mike – a self-described "mischief maker" – has likewise raised basic questions about current practices in study abroad. In an August 2013 piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, he asserted that the "educational tourism" prevalent in U.S. study abroad to non-traditional destinations was "closer to pornography than it is to education." Needless to say, this observation provoked some heated exchanges in the comments section that followed.

Many others - a total of 27 international educators (see sidebar at far right) – were mentioned in the survey as *provocateurs* in our field. Four, however, were mentioned by at least three colleagues and therefore deserve special note. These are Barbara Burn, Joe Mestenhauser, Riall Nolan and Philip Altbach.

**Barbara Burn** (d. 2002), longtime SIO at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, was recognized as an indefatigable advocate for clarity in the formulation of internationalizations goals and strategies and for more research in the field. Barbara was an expert at probing the weakest point of a presenter's argument, always seeking a path to valid and more useful new knowledge. She was also the first female president of AIEA (1994) - a kind of provocation in its own right.

**Josef Mestenhauser** (University of Minnesota) has spent the past sixty years and more teaching, lecturing, consulting, mentoring, researching and writing on international education. The "big idea" he has argued over the years is that universities are knowledge *systems* and that change - including internationalization - must acknowledge this reality to have any chance of success. "International education is a *mega-goal*," he writes, "that should permeate the entire institutional being. . . ."

**Riall Nolan**, former SIO at Purdue University and widely published developmental anthropologist, may be unique among these other *provocateurs* in bringing a particularly rich

background in project work in developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Recently, he has focused on career issues in the profession of international education, especially the promise and perils of moving into the SIO role from a faculty position. He is currently co-editing (with Gil Merckx) a volume on SIO careers.

**Philip Altbach**, Director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, has consistently emphasized the unequal playing field in global higher education and the potential for neo-colonialism by international education practitioners in the West/North. Another theme in Altbach's writings is that higher education as a *public* good is losing ground to the view that higher education is a *private* good to be paid for by "consumers." All of these features of the current scene, Altbach argues, pose important ethical issues.

### **The President as IE Provocateur**

By referring to "colleagues" in my initial survey announcement, I did not realize that, by implication, respondents were likely to exclude other key figures in IE, such as college and university presidents. This is unfortunate because a number of presidents have certainly "provoked" our field through their executive decisions, often with a level of institutional impact that is not available to SIOs. In this group I would certainly include **Peter McPherson** (Michigan State University), **Sanford Ungar** (Goucher College), **David Maxwell** (Drake University), **Julio León** (Missouri Southern State University) and **John Sexton** (NYU). The diversity of the kinds of institutions represented by these CEOs suggests that each faced a unique challenge and chose to advance his institution's internationalization in a unique way.

Just to summarize the provocations that these CEOs have launched: Sanford Ungar made study abroad a requirement for all undergraduates at Goucher. Goucher remains the only institution in the U.S. to embrace such a requirement. David Maxwell's decision to abolish Drake's foreign language department drew sharp criticism from the foreign language establishment in the U.S. but turned Drake toward a more flexible program focused on communicative competence rather than seat time and a literature-focused pedagogy. Julio León took a small regional institution in Joplin, Missouri, and transformed its ethos into one that is multicultural and global. Peter McPherson brought huge global cred to his role as MSU president in the 1990s, but his declaration in 1995 that MSU would send 40% of its undergraduates abroad seemed either visionary or fanciful – but certainly provocative. John Sexton – well, what can one say? – has led NYU to espouse a uniquely ambitious model of the "global network university" with branch campuses around the world that offer integrated curricula leading to full degrees. Sexton has also stirred a good deal of backlash to his initiatives; the AIEA member who nominated him confessed "I certainly feel provoked by him."

What both SIO and university president *provocateurs* have in common is that they all argue that there is not enough provocation - truly new and disruptive ideas - in higher education in general and international education in particular. Real change will require more than a relatively few provocative voices. Real change will require more collective rethinking of current approaches to global learning, global alignments, global citizenship – and international education leadership.

## **IE Provocateurs (2014)**

In Alphabetical Order

Tony Adams\* - Macquarie/RMIT (Australia)  
Philip Altbach – Boston College  
Uwe Brandenburg - CHE Consult; Humboldt-Univ. Berlin (Germany)  
Peter Briggs – Michigan State University  
Thomas Buntru – Univ. of Monterrey (Mexico)  
Barbara Burn\* - Univ. of Massachusetts-Amherst  
Rosina Chia – East Carolina Univ.  
Bill Clabby – St. Edward's Univ.\ISA\UCSD  
Hans de Wit – Univ. of Applied Sciences Amsterdam/ Università Cattolica del  
Sacro Cuore (Netherlands/Italy)  
Tom Gouttierre – Univ. of Nebraska Omaha  
Joan Gore – FIE  
Nico Jooste – Nelson Mandela University (South Africa)  
Jane Knight – Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Canada)  
Andrew Law – Denison Univ.  
James Leck\* – Boston University  
Mitch Leventhal – SUNY Albany  
Simon Marginson – Univ. of London/Univ. of Melbourne (UK/Australia)  
Francisco Marmolejo – World Bank/CONAHEC  
Gil Merckx - Duke Univ.  
Josef Mestenhauser – Univ. of Minnesota  
Riall Nolan – Purdue University  
Tony Ogden – Univ. of Kentucky  
Norm Peterson - Montana State Univ.  
Elmer Poe – East Carolina Univ.  
Mike Reddin\* – London School of Economics (UK)  
Ahad Shahbaz - Interlink  
Sam Shepherd – Associates in Cultural Exchange  
James Skelly - Juniata College  
Stephen Straight - Binghamton Univ.  
Kay Thomas – Univ. of Minnesota  
JoAnn DeArmas Wallace - Juniata College  
Michael Woolf – CAPA International Education (USA/UK)  
Eric Zimmerman – IDC Herzliya (Israel)

\*Deceased