



Association of International Education Administrators
Leaders in International Higher Education

Spring 2019 Presidential Message

Dr. Cheryl Matherly, AIEA President



Dear AIEA Members,

Last month, Karin Fischer wrote a provocative article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that traced the many challenges that are resulting in the retrenchment of internationalization activities at some US colleges and universities (“How International Education’s Golden Age Lost Its Sheen,” March 28, 2019.) She makes the sobering observation that, despite their rhetoric about their commitment to global engagement, many institutions never fully embraced international education. “Commitment, on campus and off, could be shallow,” she wrote. “It was a nice thing to do, yes, but rarely fundamental.”

Unfortunately, shallow roots provide little or no protection in a storm. Those of us in the field are well aware of the social, economic, and political winds that are buffeting many institutions’ commitment to global education: the rise of populism and the return of nationalism in response to perceptions that globalization has contributed to economic dislocation (leading to skepticism about contributions of immigrants to the US economy); the entrenchment of partisan

political tensions that threaten to unsettle diversity goals and accessibility efforts (including proposed changes in the student visa landscape); the emergence of new world-class universities around the globe (which are attracting international students as the perception of the US commitment to pluralism is being questioned). These are challenges, but may also lead to opportunities. For example, the rising reputation of international universities may lead to new partnerships and fresh destinations for study abroad. Yet, when you add to this list of global concerns the many domestic issues facing higher education in general—such as shifting student demographics, changing demands of the labor market, emerging educational technologies, growing national demands for accountability and quality assurance, and declining public funding—it is clear why US colleges and universities are questioning their long held assumptions about how higher education works.

Perhaps it is natural that the most recent initiatives, the internationalization efforts in particular, are the first to be questioned, scaled back, or at risk of abandonment. Yet, as several of our AIEA colleagues interviewed by Fischer noted, the ‘end of an era’ may mean accepting change, but does not have to mean embracing retreat. We should take heart at that optimistic note, even as we keep our eyes open to the issues abroad in the world.



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The theme of the 2019 AIEA annual conference asked “What’s next?,” and explored the possibilities and probabilities in the future of international higher education. We considered how current global trends will change the entire higher education sector, paying particular attention to their impacts on the ongoing internationalization of the academy, and how the confluence of these forces would change the role of the senior international officer. Many of our colleagues described the ways in which their institutions were innovating with student recruitment, educational programs, partnerships, and faculty engagement. Our opening plenary speaker, prominent educator Esther Wojcicki, considered how student learning can shape and be shaped by technology. Dr. Rafael Bras, the provost at Georgia Tech, continued that theme, describing how his institution had reimagined itself in order to remain relevant for a generation of lifelong learners, who will not want all of their instruction delivered in a brick and mortar campus. Arun Gandhi’s closing plenary challenged us to think about how we prepare students to live lives of meaning and integrity. As we collectively face the challenges to our profession, I think it is obvious that we must also heed his message: we must continue to lead our institutions with efforts that engage the world and one another with integrity.

It is with this backdrop that AIEA embarked on a new strategic plan that considers how the association can support our members, and higher education more generally, through innovative, transformational, comprehensive, and perhaps even radical approaches to internationalization. The plan, which was developed by a task force beginning in Summer 2018 and introduced to members for feedback during the conference, offers a compelling vision for the association. The vision is that AIEA should be seen as:

. . . an essential organization for professionals around the world who have a strategic position leading the development and management of comprehensive internationalization of higher education. AIEA [should be] globally recognized for advancing strategic, transformational, and comprehensive approaches; empowering those who lead such efforts; convening global conversations on key issues; and partnering with other organizations to develop evidence-based, sustainable and forward-looking understandings of comprehensive internationalization for all.

How do we do this? The plan places priority on programs and services that build on AIEA’s distinctive ability to convene members for collaboration, foster new thinking in the field, and provide our members with essential, up-to-date, globally-derived and globally-relevant expert information, training, and networking opportunities. It identifies partnerships with diverse players in global higher education as key to innovating. It commits to ensuring AIEA’s continued relevance for a diverse and globally representative membership. Throughout all of this, the plan considers the needs of members who are leading campus internationalization – or as we are discovering, potentially managing change in campus internationalization.

We have received a great deal of constructive feedback from members about what they expect from AIEA. The new strategic plan, to be voted on by the full board in June 2019, reflects this valuable input. I am excited by the new directions in which the association will be heading, while also remaining true to its core values.



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Karin Fischer rightly named the challenges we face. But rightly read, the story she tells should not lead us to despair. Rather, we should plant wisely, and prune sensibly, to ensure that roots grow deep and strong. We can continue boldly to cultivate our garden, even as the passing storms and stresses rage.

Cheryl Matherly
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2019-2020 AIEA President