



AIEA President's Message to Members – May 2010

Over the last few months many national and international leaders and organizations have focused on the increasingly important topic of internationalizing higher education. Our highly successful annual meeting in Washington DC in February addressed the theme of “Internationalizing higher education: Essential to our future.” We heard Arthur Levine, President of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, argue that internationalization is both important and inevitable and that progress in this area requires vision and leadership. He further noted that the question isn’t whether U.S. higher education will become more internationalized, but rather what a full internationalized university will look like and how soon these changes will occur. Nancy Zimpher, Chancellor of the State University of New York, added that rhetoric wasn’t going to accomplish the needed changes and that she is convening a strategic-planning session in New York State to set priorities for system wide internationalization. Larry Vanderhoef, Chancellor Emeritus of the University of California, Davis, further reflected on his personal experiences in graduate school with Iranian and Taiwanese students and observed that the best chance for healing country to country relationships and changing students’ world views is through the universities. Thus he argued that the responsibility of international higher education leaders will only increase in the future. Finally, during this meeting the new U.S. Undersecretary of Education, Martha Kanter, also commented that internationalizing American education can neither be seen as an add-on nor remain the sole responsibility of higher education. She emphasized that internationalization at all levels of education is a high priority of the Obama administration.



In March of this year, the 5th Annual Institute of International Education (IIE) conference on “Best Practices in Internationalizing the Campus” included presentations by university presidents, provosts, deans and government officials and focused on strategic planning for comprehensive internationalization. President Alan Goodman noted that, in partnership with universities, IIE has helped to develop global leaders and internationalize higher education through such efforts as the Fulbright Program, Boren Scholarships, the Gilman International Scholarships, and the Hubert Humphrey Fellows Program. These key international programs have translated into life-changing experiences for tomorrow’s leaders.

In May, the European Union sponsored a conference on “Internationalization of Higher Education: A foresight exercise for 2020 and beyond” in Madrid, Spain. The Spanish President, currently serving as President of the European Union, had chosen this theme as one of his highest priorities. Mr. Angel Gabilondo Pujol, a plenary speaker and the Spanish Minister of Education, observed that internationalization of higher education is an inescapable imperative. Many of the other speakers reiterated this observation and elaborated on numerous efforts to realize this imperative.

These recent national and international conferences exemplify the increasing recognition of the central importance of internationalizing all functions of our institutions. Equally important is the expansion of our profession and the critical role of AIEA. Our organization has continued to expand its activities in furthering the internationalization of higher education and has become an



essential partner in the strategic planning and implementation of policies and the professional development of the leaders of this core academic function.

In the last several years AIEA has emerged as the leading professional organization in international higher education in North America. While there are other organizations, such as the American Council of Education (ACE), the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU), and NAFSA: Association of International Educators, which have important programs, commissions, or councils devoted to international higher education, AIEA is the only U.S. professional organization to focus exclusively on the needs and issues facing senior international leaders.

AIEA has focused on both current leaders and more recently on the preparation of the future generation. For example, the new highly competitive AIEA Presidential Fellows Program matches emerging leaders from three types of colleges and universities with an experienced senior international officer who serves as a mentor for the academic year. In addition, AIEA has increasingly recognized the need to collaborate with sister organizations around the world and has been instrumental in establishing and maintaining those relationships both in the U.S. and abroad in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. This year our annual meeting attracted over 500 professionals from more than 25 different countries.

As the field continues to grow in size, substance, and importance, our role in the policy arena will continue to expand. We have made significant contributions to the development of federal



policy in the areas of language and culture, study abroad and international student and scholar mobility, areas that will all likely remain priorities in the future. However, going forward we will have the opportunity to be a more significant actor in a broader range of policies such as international development and outreach, institution building, research collaboration, and public diplomacy.

The next few years are critical. With our rapidly changing global challenges (i.e. political, social, economic, and security) the need to internationalize higher education is more important today than ever before. Senior leaders will need to work effectively across all functions within their institutions and in shaping broad decisions nationally and internationally. At the same time, if AIEA is to be an important player in this process, it is imperative that we maintain and strengthen our professional organization. An organization is only as strong as its members and their active participation. Therefore, I personally encourage each member to identify ways to contribute to strengthening AIEA and to be an active part of our future.

--Dr. William Lacy, 2010 AIEA President

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