



**Association of International Education Administrators**  
*Leaders in International Higher Education*

## **Spring 2015 Presidential Message: SIOs and Global Responsibilities**

*Dr. Jenifer Cushman, AIEA President*



As AIEA explores the theme “Building a Better World: The Academy as Leader,” we are led to consider our global responsibilities as international educators. Certainly, Senior International Officers (SIOs) are consumed with a large number of duties, many of which serve the mission of encouraging global awareness in our students and increasing the scope and relevance of our efforts. In fact, most SIOs could claim that much of what we do is aimed at bettering our communities and our world. As we approach our internationalization duties and global learning goals, we must do so thoughtfully and keep in mind our larger responsibilities to the world.

The recent dissemination of a list of seventeen United Nations goals for sustainable development<sup>1</sup> is an opportunity for SIOs to ask what their institutions are doing to address global responsibilities. When I represented AIEA on the panel “A wealth of nations: trends from around the world” at the European Association of International Education conference in Glasgow in September 2015, access, equity, and sustainability figured prominently in discussions by international education leaders. Environmental sustainability as expressed through UN Goal 13: “Climate Action” can be a difficult question for international educators, for example, even as they champion Goal 4: “Quality Education” through study abroad. While study abroad is a powerful tool to connect students with the world, we must be cognizant of the potentially negative impact of large groups of students burning fossil fuels on their way, sometimes with little cultural preparation, to countries with different sociocultural expectations and challenges from their own. Senior International Officers have a responsibility to consider international partnerships in the context of UN Goal 10: “Reducing Inequalities,” and acknowledge obligations to and impact on less resourced countries as well as to less resourced students.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>



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As head of a regional campus within a system, I am particularly interested in equity questions, and my [spring message](#) referenced the importance of extending global learning opportunities to underserved populations. Just as regional campuses are physically distant from the central campus, so too are they often marginalized in terms of ideology and resources. When regional campuses are established in other countries from the central campus, this equity question can be further complicated. A July 2014 article<sup>2</sup> in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* raised the question: When is a branch campus truly local to its community? It also made explicit a missionary or colonizing assumption in the founding of many branch campuses, especially in other countries, that the central campus is the source of validity and knowledge.

So, too, must international educators acknowledge a basic inequity inherent in internationalization models that rely heavily on study abroad. Over 15 years ago, Jane Knight noted in “Issues and Trends in Internationalization” that “international education is perceived as the reserve of the elite,” and “as long as internationalization is thought of in terms of academic mobility, elitism will continue to be an issue.”<sup>3</sup> The charge is not groundless: It is often the case that the students who study abroad are those that can afford the resources to travel and the time to take classes that might not match exactly with degree requirements. At the same time, as we consider other strategies to foster access to global learning, we should not believe in the either/or “Excellence v Equity” question suggested by the eponymous article in the March 28 issue of *The Economist*.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Mary Jean LeTendre, former director of Title I compensatory education for the US Department of Education claimed that this is a false dichotomy, saying “Excellence in education need not mean elitism, and equity need not mean mediocrity.”<sup>5</sup> There are many ways to bring the world to our students, and it is our responsibility as international educators to explore all avenues to work towards Quality Education as well as all other UN goals. As we grapple with our global responsibilities within the context of our own institutions and countries and within the world, I invite you to join us in February at the annual AIEA conference in Montreal, where we continue to explore these and other issues in order to use our leadership roles in Building a Better World.

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<sup>2</sup> Lane & Kinser “Can Overseas Branch Campuses Reflect Local Values?” (2014, July 8) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/can-overseas-branch-campuses-reflect-local-values/33537>

<sup>3</sup> Knight, Jane (1999). “Issues and Trends in Internationalization. *A New World of Knowledge: Canadian Universities and Globalization*. Ed. Bond & Lemasson. Ottawa, ON, Canada: International Development Research Centre. 227.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan, Emma. Excellence vs. equity (2015, March 28). *The Economist*. Retrieved from: <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21646985-american-model-higher-education-spreading-it-good-producing-excellence>

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 1: In the Right Direction. (1984, December 6). *Nashua Telegraph* p. 51. Retrieved from: <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19841206&id=UJsrAAAIBAJ&sjid=qPoFAAAAIBAJ&pg=4797,1125350&hl=en>