



AIEA GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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1. Tell us a little about yourself, including your current degree program and hometown.

I am a Ph.D. student at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) in the higher education and organizational change program. Before my program, I was an international student advisor at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (UNC) as well as an outreach coordinator for their Center for European Studies. I also completed an M.Ed. at North Carolina State University in higher education and student affairs while working at UNC. I grew up in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but currently live in Berkeley, California with my partner.

2. What was the most important reason for choosing your current degree program?

There were several reasons I was drawn to UCLA, including the diverse faculty research interests, their reputation for strong research methodology, and an active alumni community. They also offered at least four years of steady funding support, which others did not. I also wanted to move to a larger, more diverse city like Los Angeles or New York City for the experience of meeting new people and living outside my home state.

3. Internationalization looks different on each campus. What does “internationalization” mean to you? How does it manifest on your campus?

To me, internationalization is a comprehensive effort to make campuses more international or globally minded. This can include increasing international exchanges (e.g., study abroad programming for domestic students and international students) but should also include developing global perspectives like curriculum development that encourages other non-American worldviews. Internationalization should also expand access to historically marginalized groups as well because, historically, global and international programming has been fairly exclusive to certain students (wealthy, white, able-bodied) and those at more well-resourced universities. UCLA has historically been an internationally connected and prestigious institution, but we are currently trying to improve access. UCLA is trying to improve racial representation in education abroad as well as financial aid





for lower-income students. They have additional resources on their website for certain marginalized or underrepresented groups, accessible through this link: <https://ieo.ucla.edu/get-started/diversity/>.

4. What has been the most transformative and rewarding international or intercultural experience for you during your current course of study?

My first international experience was through global studies and comparative literature courses during undergrad. In these classes, I improved my language skills and gained insight into new cultures and worldviews. I also studied in France (with extended trips to Italy and Spain), which would not have been possible without financial aid. This experience greatly improved my French and Spanish as well as my confidence to travel. I later worked with international students, which was extremely rewarding – though at times difficult – as I helped them with immigration issues and sociocultural adjustment and trained other staff and faculty on how to support them better.

5. What are some of the biggest challenges facing internationalization at university campuses as seen through the lens of graduate students? What solutions might you offer to these challenges?

In my program, we do not have many international graduate students or course offerings. We separate higher education from comparative higher education and international higher education, and the former (my program) historically enrolls mostly domestic students and focuses on U.S. education systems. I have supplemented coursework in our more international sister department, but it can be frustrating, at times, facing the American-centered nature of our program and the larger field. I would love to see an international/comparative higher education course offered as a core course or at least a permanent elective. For the larger UCLA campus, I would say our biggest issues are access for marginalized students to study abroad and more financial aid for international students.





6. What are some key ways that higher education administrators or faculty members might increase international and intercultural experiences on campuses?

For those of us studying higher education, centering more non-US perspectives by having a core course focused on international perspectives would be an improvement; or, at least, adding some readings on the foundational courses that are not published for or by U.S. authors. I understand many applied fields like education are focused on training people to practice a profession in a localized field, but I believe understanding how other countries are tackling similar problems in different ways is an important exercise. In addition, most U.S.-based administrators should be familiar with international student issues such as visa regulations and cultural differences to better support them. I also firmly believe financial support for study abroad and for lower-income international students is fundamental to increasing access, as many students like me could not afford it and sometimes believe it is not even possible without good communication from campus offices.

Faculty and administrators also need to make sure experiences like study abroad and globally focused course work are integrated into the curriculum and campus life. In many cases, I have talked to students who want to take these courses but then must take extra courses to graduate in a timely manner, often during the summer with less or no financial aid. Curriculum planning and proactive advising can prevent some of these conflicts and make it easier on students, and it ensures globally focused course work and study abroad are intentionally embedded into school practices, not just something a few people do on the side if they so choose. In terms of advising, better collaboration with key partners like academic advising units and financial aid departments could streamline advising. Based on my own experience and interviews I've done, students often feel bounced back and forth between many offices on campus, which is frustrating. They sometimes receive information from one office that contradicts advice from another, and sometimes there are complicated questions that need to be deferred to other campus departments. Many common questions about major credits or financial aid can be researched and addressed in advance to better streamline bureaucratic processes.

