



# SIO PATHWAYS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Harvey Charles • *University of Minnesota*

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Name: **Harvey Charles**

Title: **Vice Provost for International Affairs**

Time Served as President: **1 Year**

**The University of Minnesota (UMN)** is a comprehensive public research university ranked among the world's most respected institutions of higher learning. UMN has the special distinction of being both a globally engaged Research 1 (R1) institution and Minnesota's land-grant university. The University enrolls 68,000 students and averages over \$1 billion in research expenditures annually.

**Dr. Harvey Charles** has been in the field of international education for more than 30 years. He has served as Senior International Officer and Professor at multiple institutions around the U.S. and is a past President of the Association of International Education Administrators. Charles' additional contributions to the field involve publishing, speaking engagements, consulting, and mentoring. Charles earned his doctorate in higher education administration with an emphasis in international education from The Ohio State University in 1991.



**1. Describe your current role as a senior international officer (SIO). How would you describe your institution? What areas are you responsible for?**

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I am not only the Chief International Officer for the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota, but also the SIO for the entire University of Minnesota system, which consists of five distinct campuses across the state. It is a large, decentralized institution, with global education and engagement happening across all schools, colleges, and campuses, and throughout the three pillars of the academy – teaching, research, and service. I oversee a large office of 130+ professional staff across multiple units that provides a range of services to international students and education abroad students. Additionally, it supports faculty in international teaching and research endeavors and houses critical initiatives such as the Office of Curriculum Internationalization, the China Center, the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change and the Center for Applied Research in Language Acquisition (a Title VI National Language Resource Center).

**2. Tell us about your career path. What were some of the critical events/decisions that led you to your current position?**

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I am one of the few SIOs of my generation to pursue a graduate degree with the intention of becoming an international education administrator. My career has taken me to seven institutions of higher education across the U.S., with considerable variation in mission, character, and size.

One of the critical events in my evolution as an international educator was an epiphany I had in recognizing that international education involved more than providing services, and actually involved seeking to impact, in fairly significant ways, the three pillars of the academy – teaching, research, and service. I came to realize that international education's transformative role must be reflected in the imperative to prepare globally competent graduates and must also support faculty in their quest to drive innovation and discovery through their active participation in global research networks.

Subsequent to this, I realized that not having the typical profile of a faculty member held me back from successfully competing for positions at larger research universities. I decided to boost my scholarly output and was then able to apply for and be awarded tenure at Northern Arizona University.





Another significant event occurred when, as an SIO at a previous university, new institutional leadership different to the one that hired me signaled a vision for international education that sharply diverged from the one I had hoped to implement. Starved for resources and deeply unhappy with the status quo, I returned to the faculty where I served as a professor of international education. This was an eye-opening experience in the sense that I realized for the first time that I could pursue a successful career as a faculty member. I also learned, however, that my passion for international education leadership as an administrator was profound and that this was the work that brought me the greatest joy. It was this experience that made me return to administrative work and to my current position.

### **3. What strengths do your identities bring to the position?**

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I love leadership. I have supervised scores of professionals in my career. Additionally, I have honed skills at inspiring groups of professionals to coalesce around a vision that we all develop, and then supporting them as they pursue that vision. I came to the U.S. as an international student and, therefore, have a firsthand understanding of the experiences shared by many international students as they adjust to a new culture. Furthermore, as a person of color, I have personally experienced othering, various forms of discrimination (both overt and subtle), and the knowledge that one has to work twice as hard to earn the same benefits that people of a more favored race or ethnicity enjoy. These identities allow me to more easily deploy compassion in dealing with those on the margins, including international students, more passion in advocating for equality and inclusion, and a deeper sensitivity to the possibilities of a stronger and richer academic milieu when we are willing to transcend cross-cultural boundaries and commit ourselves to a more diverse community. Finally, as a scholar, I have been able to make important contributions to the field of international education. Through my publications, participation in academic conferences, and my training of international educators new to the field, I have been able to share valuable insights and help to influence the growth and development of this field.





#### 4. What advice would you give to aspiring SIOs in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience? Would this advice vary based on a person's identities?

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*First*, seek to understand what international education is all about and what it should aim to accomplish. Accepting traditional conceptions of internationalization that suggest, for example, that it is only about student mobility, mitigates against a more expansive vision and ultimately leadership in international education.

*Second*, engage in international education professional organizations. Leverage your academic expertise to make scholarly contributions to these organizations where possible and share practical experiences that can contribute to the success of those in the proverbial trenches.

*Third*, seek to move international education from the margins of your campus to the center. The goal should ultimately be to institutionalize international education. Find ways to influence academic decision-making on the campus. Serve on strategic planning committees, cultivate strong relationships with faculty, and agitate to make international education a strategic goal of your institution.

#### 5. What would you do differently if you were just beginning your career in international education?

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In some ways, I would change nothing! The University of Nevada, Reno, was the perfect place for me to begin my career, with a supportive and visionary supervisor, and caring colleagues. My first position as Director of International Student and Scholar Services gave me a chance to learn the work of international education as an administrator, after having engaged in this work from the perspective of a scholar and graduate student. On the other hand, however, it can be quite challenging for career administrators (as opposed to faculty) to break into academic administrative roles, particularly at large research universities. Experienced international educators know that international education is its own field of endeavor with standards of professional practice, theoretical constructs that support scholarship in the field, and a range of insights that inform best practices. While it is important for the international educator to have credibility with the faculty, familiarity with the field, in my view, is an important predictor of success in the role. As such, knowing what I now know, and having started my career as an administrator, I would have worked sooner on building a scholarly record in order to acquire a more balanced profile between scholarship and administration.



## 6. How does your work as SIO intersect and align with your institution's mission and initiatives? Is there intersection with your institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion work?

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The University of Minnesota is a pioneer in international education--doing this work for decades before most other colleges and universities. The University of Minnesota has also strategically embraced diversity, equity, and inclusion—a commitment visible not only in its strategic plan, but among the leadership of the university, in the student body, and in its community engagement. What makes the University of Minnesota special is that there is a surprising degree of commitment to international education in practically all fifteen schools and colleges as well as the four other system campuses, apart from the flagship Twin Cities campus. There are administrators leading DEI efforts in all colleges/schools and campuses and administrators leading international education efforts in most of these academic units. It would probably never be possible to describe the perfect intersection between these important priorities on any given campus. What matters in my view is a deep and strategic commitment to these values, and an ongoing commitment to their implementation.

## 7. What strategic issues do you think SIOs should prioritize at this time?

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The academy desperately needs a more concerted approach to comprehensive internationalization. Sadly, many international educators are distracted by the need to generate revenues through international student recruitment and admissions. The very survival of many of these offices depends on their success in such an endeavor. This takes away valuable time from supporting initiatives more central to international education, such as faculty international teaching and research and curriculum internationalization. Another strategic issue worthy of attention is linking internationalization to the sustainability agenda. Not only is this a global issue and a strategic priority on many campuses, but it concerns human survival. This can be an effective way of helping relevant constituencies understand and embrace the important work of internationalization. Finally, curriculum internationalization is the most compelling way to leverage internationalization in the pursuit of student transformation. The SIO is the only administrator with a university-wide mandate to do this work, and there is no good excuse if such activity is shunned. There are many opportunities for SIOs to learn a variety of strategies to pursue curriculum internationalization.





**8. What has been your favorite international experience so far? (This may be an initiative you have shepherded, an event held on your campus, an experience while studying abroad, an experience with your local international community, or anything else that stands out in your international career.)**

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I was smitten by the International Engineering Program (IEP) at the University of Rhode Island the first time I encountered it in 2000. In a nutshell, this program, which is effectively a global learning pathway program, packages study abroad, internship abroad, and additional second language study into the undergraduate program, creating a seamless progression into all of these experiences within the four years that it would ordinarily take to earn the bachelor's degree (or five years if students earn two bachelor's degrees). I laid the groundwork for a similar program at Georgia Tech, which was fully implemented by my successor. Since then, I have launched similar programs at Northern Arizona University and the University at Albany, SUNY. I remain committed to this program almost 25 years later because I believe it is a relatively easy and affordable way to engage a diverse group of students in a meaningful process of global learning that effectively guarantees global competence upon graduation. The transformation among students who complete this program is even more impressive and conspicuous than among students who have only had a study abroad experience. They possess the skills that many employers seek among the graduates they wish to hire; they have a level of maturity and sophistication not evident among their peers who did not enroll in such a program; they have cross-cultural and linguistic competencies; can navigate ambiguity; and they can successfully engage in teams--signaling the ambitious possibilities of undergraduate education. I am currently working on implementing a similar program at the University of Minnesota.

**9. Why does internationalization matter? To you, to your institution, to your country, to the world?**

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International education is about helping us to understand how best to navigate and transcend the artificial boundaries that exist among humans so that we can collaborate in the grand and dynamic experiment of preserving the one community (the planet) we share and finding joy in the process. Internationalization matters because by understanding one another, especially because we are different, we can work together to achieve the many good things that we all want. It matters to the university because the academy is the only institution that has an explicit mandate to create knowledge that can be used to further the interests of a harmonious and healthy global community. It matters to the nation, because it can choose to





marshal its immense resources to influence other nations to collaborate (something incredibly difficult to do) rather than wage war. Internationalization matters to the world because it truly is the only strategy that can keep barbarism at bay and foster the values and practices that cater to the best interests of humankind.

