



AIEA GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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HANNAH PARK • *George Mason University (USA)*



GRADUATE STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

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

Originally from South Korea, I am a PhD candidate at George Mason University (USA) in the Higher Education program. Previously, I worked as the Campus & Office Coordinator at George Mason University Korea (Mason Korea) located in Songdo, South Korea. I completed a Master of Public Policy at KDI School of Public Policy and Management in South Korea and a Bachelor of Arts program (International Business) at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

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

I decided to pursue a PhD program at George Mason University that would bridge the two campuses in the United States and South Korea. I have witnessed the significance of improved collaboration, engagement, and partnership with the main campus in the U.S. The professional development opportunities and the proximity to Washington, D.C. motivated me to consider George Mason University as a pioneering institution for my doctoral studies.

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

I view internationalization as a methodological process and engagement for global interaction that advances and develops knowledge and awareness. I am a strong proponent of internationalization of campuses that supports experiential learning and diverse perspectives. During my PhD program, I completed graduate assistantships in University Life, the Office of International Programs and Services, and the Office of the Provost & Executive Vice President. I supported the initiatives for students, faculty, and administration between the U.S. and South Korea campuses. George Mason University continues to make strides in internationalization that supports students, faculty, and administrators for international collaboration. Mason’s Global Education Office (GEO) and Mason Korea are the bedrocks to support global initiatives for student learning and faculty engagement. GEO offers 200 programs in 60 nations, with over 100 partners. In June 2024, Mason Korea celebrated its 10th anniversary in Songdo, South Korea.

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

My most transformative and rewarding international and intercultural experience was attending my first conference at the 2022 NAFSA Regional Conference (Region VIII) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I received my first travel grant to attend the conference that expanded my professional and personal development in international higher education. Participating in informative and insightful sessions, networking, and visiting local campuses broadened my understanding and value of international education. I continue to reflect on these international and intercultural experiences that shape how I engage with colleagues to support cultural awareness and growth to foster stronger collaboration, trust, and partnership.

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?

The challenges facing internationalization at university campuses are vast. Many graduate students are concerned about their career prospects upon graduation. As many higher education institutions are grappling with declining student enrollment and waning finances, students are distressed about their career prospects and the value of the return on investment in their graduate education. Universities would need to work with potential employers to align graduate courses with career preparation and readiness for the domestic and international workforce. Furthermore, how would technological advancements in artificial intelligence and metaverse affect international higher education and future careers? These are evolving challenges for internationalization at university campuses.

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

Higher education administrators and faculty need to consider international engagement as part of their strategic initiatives. How would international and intercultural experiences support career prospects? Students would strongly benefit by having direct involvement with global employers who support their experiential learning as part of the curriculum. Students are unable to connect the dots or witness how to engage in an international environment without hands-on experience. Internships, practicums, and assistantships provide valuable insights that are foundational for career readiness to determine the best next steps and seek full-time opportunities to work in a globalized workforce. Students need to see themselves in those positions where they are able to execute with effectiveness and efficiency, contribute to the team, and have the confidence to work with international colleagues and peers.

Strong financial support for study abroad is crucial to international education. The costs associated with study abroad may deter students from seeking study abroad experiences. Financial incentives, such as scholarships and work-study programs, would provide assurance for students in financial need. In efforts to increase international and intercultural experiences, students need to immerse themselves in a distinctive cultural and social architecture to gain the nuanced experiences of professional and personal development.