

THE  
INTERNATIONAL  
DIMENSIONS  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

AGB ASSOCIATION OF  
GOVERNING BOARDS  
OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

The  
Guardians  
Initiative™

Reclaiming the Public Trust

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The Guardians Initiative: Reclaiming the Public Trust™

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**“Internationalization” is the process by which an American academic institution pursues opportunities outside the United States through such activities as the formation of academic partnerships, the recruitment of potential students, and the pursuit of new sources of funding.**

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## Higher Education and the World

**T**he world beyond the United States presents a complex set of opportunities and risks for colleges and universities. If institutions approach the opportunities strategically—ensuring careful alignment with institutional goals and thoughtful plans for managing risk—the results can afford a wide range of benefits, including new and stimulating learning opportunities, vibrant and diverse campus cultures, and additional revenue. For many stakeholders—trustees, administrators, faculty, students, and alumni—these benefits will justify investments in international expansion.

Simply defined, “internationalization” is the process by which an American academic institution pursues opportunities outside the United States through such activities as the formation of academic partnerships, the recruitment of potential students, and the pursuit of new sources of funding. Many institutions will start this process by asking whether they are adequately preparing their students for a world that is increasingly dominated by challenges that transcend national borders. Their responses will be a key component in a more comprehensive plan for internationalization.

Most institutions face a constantly shifting set of international risks and opportunities, and internationalization is best understood as an ongoing process. It is not the same as globalization; internationalization is an institutional process, whereas globalization is the process by which countries exchange goods, services, people, capital, and knowledge. For example, the flow of students and scholars across national borders is one aspect of globalization, while institutional strategies to manage those flows is one aspect of internationalization.

Beyond primary stakeholders, however, arguments that focus on the benefits to the institution may seem self-serving, especially when campus leaders develop an international strategy without consultation and buy-in from broader communities. Beyond primary stakeholders, the “what is good for our university is good for everyone” argument will not suffice. Although public opposition is rare, a vague skepticism about international programs can reinforce the view that higher education is not in the business of serving the general public. An international strategy that engages the local community may be essential—especially for public institutions—and board members can provide an important bridge between campus and community

stakeholders. Once engaged with these broader communities, institutions may have to go beyond explaining and justifying and focus on the delivery of tangible benefits.

Internationalization rarely begins with strategic intent. Administrators often follow their personal interests and connections to create international partnerships, faculty may create programs that build on their areas of expertise, and students from other countries may find universities in the United States through their

weak and uncoordinated policies on student safety and health. Following a review of international activities, many institutions adopt strategic approaches that include written goals and the appointment of a senior administrator who is accountable for meeting them.

The international goals for any individual institution will depend on its location, its mission, and the priorities of key stakeholders, both internal and external. Board members should be part of the process

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own efforts. For these reasons, when institutions conduct thorough inventories of international activities on their campuses, they are often surprised at the diversity and scale. An uncoordinated approach can increase risk in a number of ways, including a lack of regulatory compliance, reputational risk through underinvestigated partnerships, and the additional risk that comes with

of defining international goals for their institution and ask specifically about the need for a written internationalization plan that aligns with the institution's mission and supports the institution's overall strategic plan. When those conversations take place, it is essential to tie international goals to broader institutional goals—a process that board members, campus executives, and local communities should pursue together.

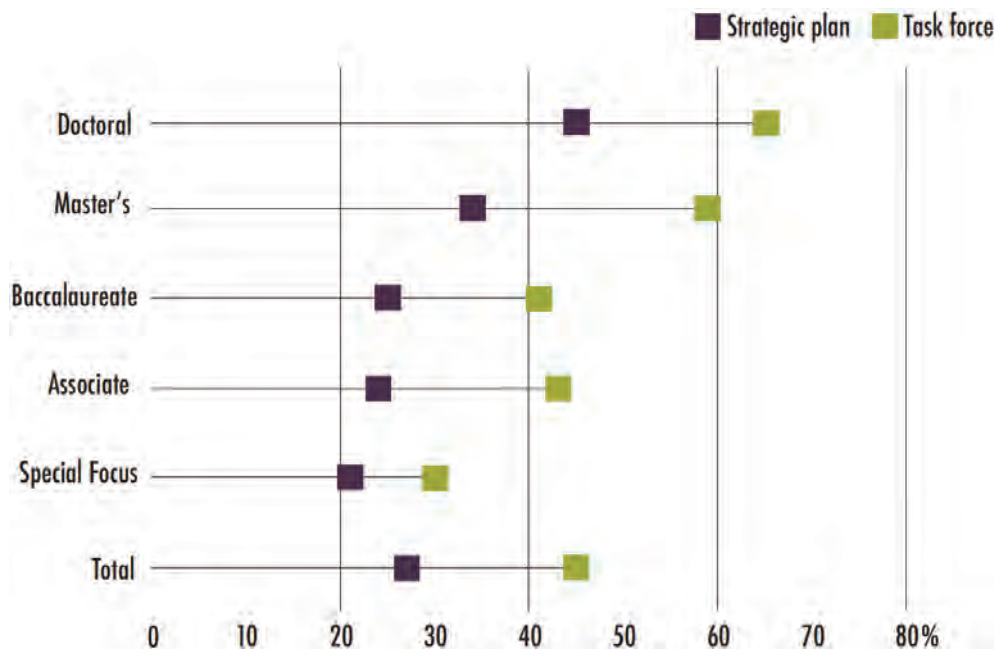
Once an institution has achieved some progress on internationalization—perhaps when it has reached enrollment targets for international students or study-abroad programs—it is common to question the need for an ongoing commitment to a coordinated international strategy. Critics may argue that internationalization is a project with a clear endpoint or that international activities should be merged with other functional areas of the institution. These arguments ignore the fact that the world is a dynamic environment with continuously shifting risks, opportunities, and priorities for the institution; negotiating this global landscape requires institutional leadership and capacity. These arguments also ignore the fact that colleges and universities in the United States remain overwhelmingly focused on domestic goals and objectives. One of the most important tasks

### **Priority Activities for Internationalization**

1. Increasing study abroad for U.S. students
2. Recruiting international students
3. Partnerships with institutions abroad
4. Internationalizing the curriculum/  
co-curriculum
5. Faculty development

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Percentage of institutions with dedicated strategic plans and task forces for internationalization (2016)

Source: Robin Helms, Lucia Brajkovic, and Brice Struthers, “Figure 3. Percentage of institutions with dedicated strategic plans and task forces for internationalization (2016),” *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2017 Edition* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2017). © 2017, American Council on Education. Reprinted with permission.

of the senior international officer (described below) is to advocate for internationalization within his or her institution.

When institutions are ready to become strategic about internationalization, there is a blueprint for proceeding. Known as “comprehensive internationalization,” this framework—developed by the American Council on Education—describes all aspects of a complete plan for internationalization. These include the following:

- *Articulation of international goals and objectives through written documents that are developed by means of broad consultation with key stakeholders, including the governing boards.* The entire institution and its supporting communities should feel a sense

of ownership, and the document should not be associated with any individual, including the president. Other supporting documents might include a case statement for key communications and fundraising.

- *An organizational structure that supports international goals and objectives.* This typically includes the creation of a new position to coordinate international activity across the entire campus. The position often reports to a vice president or president and should have clear responsibility for delivering on international goals and objectives. The Association of International Education Administrators employs the term senior international officer to describe individuals in this position, although actual titles vary widely.

- *International learning goals for every student who will graduate from the institution, developed through broad consultation with students, faculty, and employers.* Institutions that already have programs for international learning should ask whether those activities are delivering on defined learning goals and whether they are reaching all students. Many institutions focus too narrowly on study-abroad programs, which can be rich learning experiences but are usually not available to most students. A commitment to the continuous measurement of student learning should be part of this effort.

and even then they may be tempted to blame global economic conditions or the political environment in the United States. For-profit companies are especially active in this area, and the international plan should be detailed enough to serve as a guide for engaging these firms.

- *A structure for managing international partnerships—especially academic partnerships but also with multinational corporations, foreign governments, and international nongovernmental organizations.* Personal connections often lead to partnerships that are not consistent with institutional goals, and

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**Board members should be part of the process of defining international goals for their institution and ask specifically about the need for a written internationalization plan that aligns with the institution's mission and supports the institution's overall strategic plan. When those conversations take place, it is essential to tie international goals to broader institutional goals—a process that board members, campus executives, and local communities should pursue together.**

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- *A review of faculty expertise, background, and connections.* Additional investments in faculty, either in the form of new hiring or professional development, should address the gaps between existing capabilities and the goals and objectives as defined through strategic planning. This process should also create guidelines to encourage faculty involvement in the development of new courses and programming. The guidelines should support entrepreneurship and experimentation while ensuring that innovations will be aligned with international goals and objectives.
- *A comprehensive plan for international students, including a global marketing plan and the establishment of dedicated support services for language training, academic advising, physical and mental health, and career advising.* Institutions often do not take comprehensive, strategic approaches to international students until they see declines in enrollment,

a good test of an international plan is whether it is strong enough to depersonalize the process of selecting and assessing partnerships. Financial gain through international partnerships can be a powerful motivator, but institutions may find themselves vulnerable to criticism that they have compromised their values in order to attract foreign funding sources. It is important to be able to demonstrate a clear, straight line between any international partnership and institutional goals and mission.

## **Making the Case: Why Campus Internationalization Is Important**

Board members and senior campus executives should be able to explain the benefits of internationalization to a broad range of stakeholders, both internal and external.



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Source: Robin Helms, Lucia Brajkovic, and Brice Struthers, “Figure 1. CIGE Model for Comprehensive Internationalization,” *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2017 Edition* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2017). © 2017, American Council on Education. Reprinted with permission.

Campus leaders should carefully consider an array of potential benefits and then select the ones that are the best fit for their institution, possibly using a board retreat for this purpose. As they develop these arguments, campus leaders should balance those that “look inward”—that is, focus on benefits to the institution—with those that “look outward” by demonstrating benefits to larger communities.

Internationalized institutions can be stronger financially. Public institutions usually charge international students nonresident tuition and may even charge them additional fees. Although the enrollment of international students requires additional staffing to offer support services and comply with federal regulations, it is rare to find a campus that is not experiencing a net financial gain. Moreover, these same students eventually become alumni who may become donors to the institution and open doors to more international opportunities.

Institutions can also generate revenue through grants and contracts that are internationally focused. Research

funding may require faculty with the relevant international expertise, and it may require additional administrative capacity to identify, cultivate, and solicit international funding sources. Beyond the realm of research, many institutions have developed the capacity to provide training and professional development to foreign nationals. Funding sources for this effort include the U.S. Department of State, foreign governments, and private sources.

International activities can improve institutional rankings, both directly and indirectly. As part of their methodologies, some rankings explicitly identify international activities, including study-abroad programs, international student enrollments, and international content in the curriculum. While most campus leaders and their boards have serious misgivings about the methodology behind these ranking systems, there is no denying that a strong showing contributes to the reputation and prestige of the institution. International activities can also indirectly affect rankings through higher standardized test scores and higher levels of research funding.



Most institutions noted for their overall excellence have significant global footprints. Much like brands in the private sector, an institution can leverage its domestic reputation to build an international one. Institutions may find themselves in advantageous cycles in which strong domestic reputations attract prestigious international partners and donors, thus further enhancing their domestic reputations. Board members and other stakeholders who have backgrounds in international business will readily understand this process.

As for the concern over immigration, international students can enroll in U.S. institutions only after they receive visas that are restricted to the purpose of studying toward university degrees. The visa laws of the United States clearly designate the student visa as “nonimmigrant,” meaning that there is no legal pathway to permanent residency. The goal of the visa application process is to verify that the student is intending to return to his or her home country after graduation. By law, the burden of proof is on the student, and rejections are common.

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The presence of international students in the United States can be a sensitive issue, however. Public concern generally falls into one or more of these areas: (1) international students may take enrollment opportunities away from domestic students, (2) they could remain in the United States following graduation and take jobs from U.S. citizens, and (3) they may pose a national security risk. With respect to the latter, the concern increasingly focuses on how these students might use their access to university research to collect valuable technology, either legally or illegally.

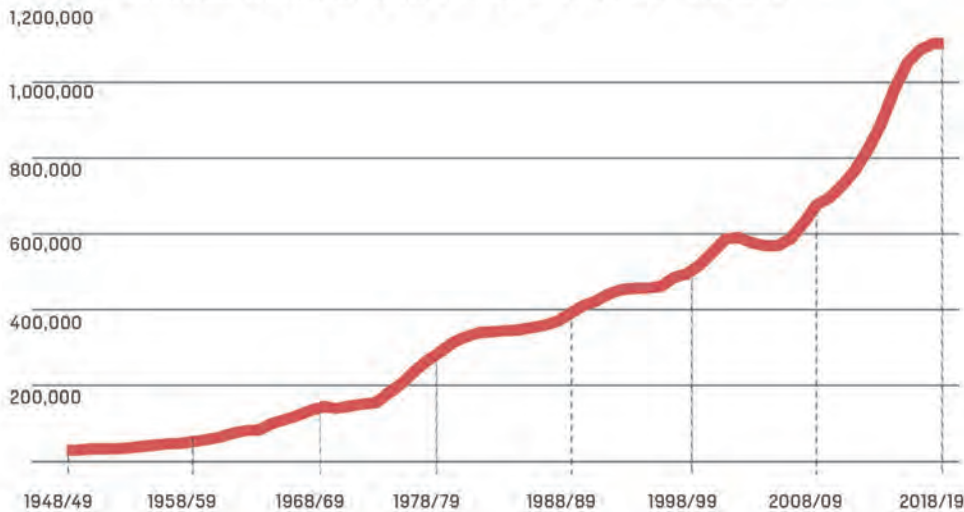
International students do displace domestic students in some instances but only at the most selective institutions. The hundreds of public and private institutions that are struggling to meet their enrollment targets can easily accommodate both domestic and international students, although there still could be displacement at the level of majors and concentrations. All institutions should anticipate this concern with evidence-based talking points for trustees and senior campus leaders. It is also helpful to cite examples of popular and effective programs that have been funded through the additional revenue generated by international students.

Finally, there is a growing sentiment within the federal government that colleges and universities are vulnerable to the loss of intellectual property to other countries, especially to China. This concern is nonpartisan and prevalent in Congress and the executive branch.<sup>1</sup> One criticism is that colleges and universities have not taken adequate precautions to prevent technology theft on their campuses, exhibiting poor awareness of existing laws and regulations and a lack of cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Even the critics acknowledge that the vast majority of international students who come to the United States do so in order to acquire knowledge legally and that most of the knowledge that exists on university campuses is not protected by law. Nevertheless, every institution should be able to demonstrate that it has taken the necessary measures to comply with laws protecting sensitive data and technology and that it is fully committed to cooperating with law enforcement.

While there is plenty of evidence to show that internationalization strengthens colleges and universities, this argument may not be effective with the many Americans who already hold critical views of higher education in general. The argument that stronger

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE U.S. 1948/49 – 2018/19



In 2018/19 there was an **increase of 0.05%** over the prior year in the number of international students in the United States.

Source: Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange is a comprehensive information resource on international students and U.S. students studying abroad. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and is published by IIE. For more information, visit [www.iie.org/opendoors](http://www.iie.org/opendoors).

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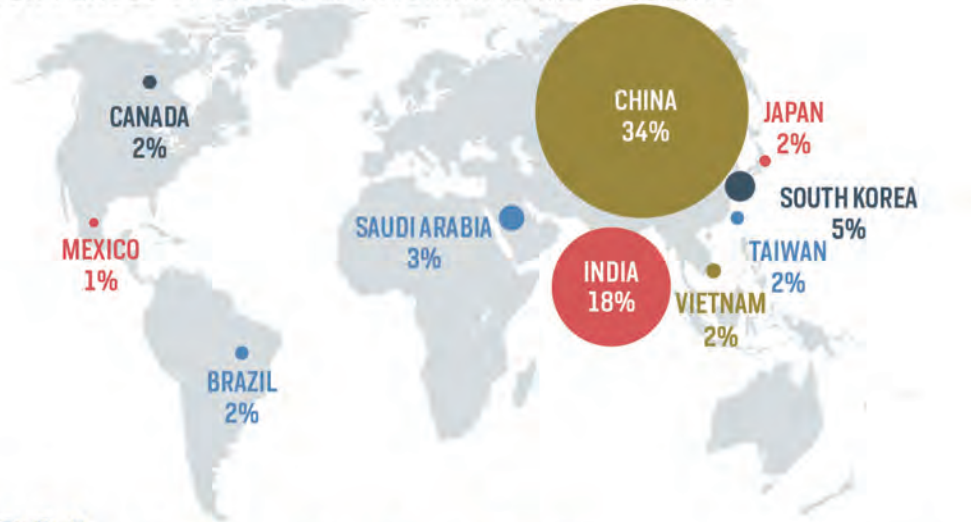
institutions are better able to serve their immediate communities assumes that colleges and universities are already committed to serving those communities; many Americans believe that academic institutions are preoccupied with their own financial and ideological goals. When institutions develop their international goals without consultation with their local communities, the skepticism is likely to grow even deeper.

Globalization has touched many communities in the United States through international trade, foreign investment, and immigration. A 2018 study undertaken by the Ohio State University and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace—*U.S. Foreign Policy for the Middle Class: Perspectives from Ohio*—examined the impact of U.S. foreign policies on the state of Ohio. The study concludes that while some parts of the state have

benefited from export growth and inward foreign direct investment, other parts have been devastated by import competition and the relocation of jobs to Mexico and other countries. Broadly speaking, larger urban areas have benefited while smaller cities and most rural areas have been deprived of growth and investment.

The same study demonstrated that foreign investors are attracted to areas where state and local governments, the private sector, and higher education are already working together on community and economic development. In addition to the traditional role of workforce training, internationalized institutions can share their expertise on foreign countries, provide foreign language training, engage in research partnerships with foreign investors, and generally contribute to more welcoming environments for foreign nationals.

TOP TEN PLACES OF ORIGIN OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



**52%** of international students come from China and India.

Source: Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange is a comprehensive information resource on international students and U.S. students studying abroad. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and is published by IIE. For more information, visit [www.iie.org/opendoors](http://www.iie.org/opendoors).

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With respect to the latter, the presence of international students and faculty can be an important factor, and a different study has shown that foreign investors are attracted to communities that have existing international populations.<sup>2</sup>

Many studies, including the Ohio project, show that Americans across the political spectrum believe that the United States should actively participate in an integrated, open global economy. Their criticism is that the benefits have largely gone to educated elites who live in large cities while everyone else has been left to struggle with low-wage jobs and limited social mobility. This view is reinforced by a lack of trust in multinational corporations and the national government—the former focused only on profits and the latter unwilling to confront countries with unfair trade and investment practices.

Colleges and universities are in a strong position to start and lead a conversation on how their communities can respond to the challenges and opportunities of globalization, including an analysis of their competitive strengths and weaknesses. Once they have completed this process, institutions are also positioned to lead on initiatives to enhance local competitiveness. Institutions that already have comprehensive, coordinated strategies for community engagement will have an advantage when they position themselves as part of the solution to the challenges of globalization. Campus leaders of other institutions may need to start with more fundamental discussions that define their relationships with their communities.

Each institution defines its external stakeholders differently. A community college may focus on the needs

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of its local community, defined as the region that funds its operations through tax revenue. An elite liberal arts college—with its faculty and students engaged in projects that address the needs of developing countries—may see the entire world as its community. Others may try to identify challenges that affect the lives of people everywhere, conflating the global with the local. The Sustainable Development Goals, a set of human development goals developed by the United Nations, is one possible starting point.

Americans across the political spectrum want their country to be strong and respected around the world; every board member and campus leader should have at least one compelling story of an international graduate who returned to a position of influence in his or her home country.

Another “looking outward” benefit is that internationalization creates knowledge that is helpful to everyone. Research increasingly involves international networks of collaborators. Part of the reason is that

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**Many of the most pressing research questions are inherently international. One example is climate change. At the most fundamental level, an international approach is necessary to assemble the data sets that are essential to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the problem. The scale of the problem is so great that no single country can assemble the global measurement systems and collect, analyze, and interpret the billions of data points.**

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For the past half century—through Democratic and Republican presidencies alike—the United States has pursued the goal of promoting stable democracies around the world, the ideal being democracies that have economic systems based on strong, dynamic private sectors. The goal of these policies is to advance American interests, including the expansion of a middle class that will purchase American goods and services. In addition to “hard” policies like trade agreements and treaties, “soft” policies promote these goals through development aid and educational and cultural exchange. Some of these exchange programs—the Fulbright Program, for example—enjoy strong support across the political spectrum. While these programs are important, they are small in comparison with a wide range of commercial activities that promote American values. The U.S. entertainment industry, through films and television programming, probably does more to influence public attitudes toward the United States than any government program. Similarly, international students at American colleges and universities return to their countries with a deeper understanding of American society and values.

research is increasingly complex, requiring larger teams of researchers and larger budgets; sharing the effort across countries makes good economic sense. Moreover, with big, multidisciplinary research projects, the chances are slim that the most qualified researchers will all be located in a single country, even one as large and wealthy as the United States. As is common in international trade in goods and services, countries often specialize on the basis of their history, geography, or politics, making the pooling and sharing of resources across borders an essential part of knowledge creation.

Many of the most pressing research questions are inherently international. One example is climate change. At the most fundamental level, an international approach is necessary to assemble the data sets that are essential to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the problem. The scale of the problem is so great that no single country can assemble the global measurement systems and collect, analyze, and interpret the billions of data points.

The next global crisis will very likely be one that requires a global solution. For instance, the outbreak of a



disease in another part of the world could affect markets for exported American products, or it could disrupt the international supply chain for a manufacturer based in the United States. International collaboration to cure or prevent seemingly “foreign” diseases—avian flu or the Ebola virus, for example—could have important benefits for Americans as well.

A successful international research network often starts with an international student studying in the United States. A doctoral student may collaborate with a faculty adviser and then continue to work with that adviser after returning home. Over time, the former student becomes part of a global research network of participants in the United States and many other countries. Research networks can form in many ways, but these early bonds are some of the most successful and enduring.

## Looking Inward and Outward: Internationalization Prepares Students for Success

It is increasingly difficult to find a job in the United States that does not have an international dimension. Even in such apparently domestic industries as health care, patients and colleagues are often immigrants born into or otherwise influenced by another culture. The skills that are necessary to succeed in this type of work environment are similar to the skills that are essential for jobs that are more obviously international, such as international business or law. Our institutions are often slow to recognize the similarity, associating “multicultural skills” with the domestic environment while assigning “international skills” to the international.

There is no magic formula for defining international knowledge and skills. Think tanks, higher education associations, and the federal government have all developed frameworks to help with this effort, but each institution should develop its own learning goals through

a process that involves all key stakeholders, including board members and potential employers. Some common learning goals include the following:

- the ability to complete tasks in an international environment;
- the ability to work in multicultural teams;
- an appreciation of one’s own cultural biases and limitations;
- knowledge of a foreign language;
- knowledge of a particular country or region of strategic importance to the United States;
- an understanding of global systems and institutions; and
- knowledge of global challenges and potential solutions.

Once defined, the next step is to create the experiences that will deliver on those goals. The general public—even individuals with university degrees—often assume that study or work outside of the United States is the only way to acquire international skills. Time spent outside of the United States definitely impresses employers, especially if the job applicant can articulate the relevant work skills acquired during the experience. Studying abroad is often expensive, however, and may not be an option for adult learners, part-time students, or those with work and family obligations. Many institutions are trying to address these obstacles, but currently only 10 percent of undergraduates are able to study abroad.

However, there are ways to acquire international knowledge and skills without leaving the United States. The most obvious is in the classroom. Nevertheless, employers place an especially high value on the ability to solve problems within an international context, including the ability to work in multicultural teams. Experiential learning opportunities that engage

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international students as learning resources can be effective in developing these skills. It is important to design these experiences with learning goals clearly in mind; institutions often assume—without evidence—that the mere presence of international *students* will broaden the perspective of domestic students. But the presence of international *scholars* on a campus will almost certainly introduce a global perspective.

Institutions can also use information technology to advance international learning through videoconferencing, social media, commercial learning platforms, and other technologies. Often referred to as collaborative online international learning or virtual exchange, these efforts typically involve the concurrent development of courses in two or more countries, creating opportunities for student collaboration. Virtual exchanges eliminate the cost of studying abroad and can be designed to simulate the multinational, virtual work teams that are increasingly common in the private sector.

Beyond employability, graduates with international knowledge and skills become better citizens. An informed electorate is, of course, an essential ingredient for a successful democracy. To cite one example, students who have studied international trade—and perhaps spent time studying in countries that are major trading partners of the United States—understand that imported goods are often inputs into exported goods, meaning that tariffs are taxes on both exports and imports.

## Conclusion

This installment of the Guardians Initiative series has focused on the international dimensions of higher education. It began with a practical, hands-on definition of internationalization:

*The process by which an American academic institution pursues opportunities outside the United States through such activities as the formation of academic partnerships, the recruitment of potential students, and the pursuit of new sources of funding.*

## Key Summary Points

- Most institutions will benefit from a thoughtful, coherent strategy that articulates international goals through an intentional, inclusive process. The strategy should be sufficiently detailed to guide the institution as it prioritizes and develops international opportunities.
- The process of planning for internationalization should tie international goals to broader institutional goals, such as improving student success and building institutional reputation. Board members should routinely ask the president to demonstrate how specific international activities are advancing the goals and mission of the institution.
- Board members and senior campus leaders should be able to demonstrate how internationalization benefits their institution, students, and communities. Board members should ask their senior leadership to create talking points with specific examples and evidence drawn from the recent experience of their institution.
- External stakeholders who are already skeptical about the value proposition for higher education are more likely to be skeptical about the benefits of internationalization. Trustees and senior campus leaders should consider the views of all stakeholders when they define their international goals and make the case for their strategic value.

## Questions for Boards

1. What are the international goals for our institution, and how do they advance our mission? Do these goals receive sufficient attention in our current strategic plan?
2. If we were presented with a major international opportunity, has our strategic planning advanced to the point where we could responsibly evaluate its potential risks and benefits? Beyond the strategic plan, do we need additional foundational documents, such as an internationalization plan or a case statement?
3. How do we manage the unique risks of internationalization? Should these risks be included as part of our overall risk management plan?
4. What information does the board need to oversee internationalization? How can this information be aligned with international goals and objectives?
5. Who are our key stakeholders, both internal and external, and how do we involve them in the setting of international goals? What are the most effective arguments for making a strong case for internationalization?
6. How should we define the scope of the senior international officer? Should he or she collaborate on decisions that are typically made by disciplinary units, decisions such as the creation of new faculty positions and the content of the curriculum?
7. How will we fund internationalization? If we decide to pursue external funding, are our strategic documents sufficiently detailed and compelling?
8. Does the composition of the board reflect the skills and knowledge needed for defining international goals, managing risk, and ensuring responsible oversight?

## Endnotes

1 Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, 2016 Top Markets Report: Education.

2 Source: Foad, Hisham. "FDI and Immigration: A Regional Analysis." *The Annals of Regional Science*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (2012): 237-259.



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