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Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action

Purpose

This document acknowledges the substantial benefits of the internationalization of higher education but also draws attention to potentially adverse unintended consequences, with a view to alerting higher education institutions to the need to act to ensure that the outcomes of internationalization are positive and of reciprocal benefit to the higher education institutions and the countries concerned.

Internationalization - An evolving concept

1. The internationalization of higher education is a dynamic process, continuously shaped and reshaped by the international context in which it occurs. As this context changes, so do the purpose, goals, meanings, and strategies of internationalization. Over the past half century, the world has changed dramatically as a result of the demise of colonial hegemonies, the end of the Cold War, the rise of new economic powers, and new regional alliances.
2. Globalization is now the most important contextual factor shaping the internationalization of higher education. Globalization is characterized by interdependence among nations and manifested in the economic, political, social, cultural, and knowledge spheres. Central to globalization are the increased mobility of goods, services, and people and the accelerating use of information and communication technologies to bridge time and space in unprecedented ways and at continually decreasing costs.
3. Globalization gives an international dimension to all aspects of our lives, communities, and professions. In higher education, it has led to intensified mobility of ideas, students and academic staff and to expanded possibilities for collaboration and global dissemination of knowledge. It has also introduced new aims, activities and actors engaged in internationalization.
4. Institutions, countries and regions in different parts of the world and at different times pursue a variety of goals and participate in diverse ways in the higher education internationalization process. Examples, such as Africa under colonial rule, where access to higher education meant travelling abroad to attend one of the universities of the colonial power, or more recently the Bologna Process, which is radically changing the higher

education landscape in Europe through internationally coordinated reforms, illustrate how internationalization fulfils different purposes and brings different rewards and challenges.

5. The goals of internationalization are continuously evolving, ranging from educating global citizens, building capacity for research, to generating income from international student tuition fees and the quest to enhance institutional prestige. New forms of internationalization such as branch campuses abroad, distance learning programs with a global reach, international educational hubs and networks now complement traditional initiatives such as student and staff mobility, curriculum change and international institutional linkages for teaching and research. New institutional players, in particular new private sector providers, have entered the scene.

6. Although the risk of brain drain remains a serious concern in some parts of the world, some countries are using international student mobility to expand their higher education capacity and capabilities. Governments and institutions are creating formal links with academic talent with their own Diasporas to promote brain circulation. And although uneven global flows of talent will remain an issue of consequence, in the long run, some of its worst impacts can be attenuated as a wider array of nations develop capacity and opportunity at home. Higher education internationalization can play a major role in developing such capacities and opportunities broadly throughout the world.

7. In short, internationalization today is remarkably different from what it was in the first half of the 20th century, in the 1960s or 1980s. A widening of drivers of higher education internationalization has had the effect of making internationalization more of an institutional imperative. The balancing of multiple intended outcomes while preserving essential institutional core values and missions is both a challenge and an opportunity. Internationalization is taking place in a radically new, complex, differentiated, and globalized context. The resulting changes in goals, activities, and actors have led to a re-examination of terminology, conceptual frameworks and previous understandings and, more importantly, to an increased but healthy questioning of internationalization's values, purposes, goals and means.

The changing nature of internationalization in the context of globalization

8. Irrespective of contextual differences within and between countries, nearly all higher education institutions worldwide are engaged in international activities and are seeking to expand them. Engaging with the world is now considered part of the very definition of quality in education and research.

9. The many enduring academic benefits of internationalization are widely recognized as fundamental. The most noteworthy include, among many others:

- Improved quality of teaching and learning as well as research.
- Deeper engagement with national, regional, and global issues and stakeholders.
- Better preparation of students as national and global citizens and as productive members of the workforce.
- Access for students to programs that are unavailable or scarce in their home countries.
- Enhanced opportunities for faculty improvement and, through mobility, decreased risk of academic 'inbreeding'.

- Possibility to participate in international networks to conduct research on pressing issues at home and abroad and benefit from the expertise and perspectives of researchers from many parts of the world.
- Opportunity to situate institutional performance within the context of international good practice.
- Improved institutional policy-making, governance, student services, outreach, and quality assurance through sharing of experiences across national borders.

10. At the same time, the new world of higher education is characterized by competition for prestige, talent and resources on both national and global scales. National and international rankings are driving some universities to prioritize policies and practices that help them rise in the rankings. At many institutions, internationalization is now part of a strategy to enhance prestige, global competitiveness and revenue. As higher education has in some respects become a global 'industry', so has internationalization of higher education become, in some quarters, a competition in which commercial and other interests sometimes overshadow higher education's fundamental academic mission and values. Competition is in danger of displacing collaboration as the foundation for internationalization.

Possible adverse consequences of internationalization

11. As internationalization of higher education evolves and grows in importance, a number of potentially adverse consequences of the process have begun to appear. These include particular risks for some institutions, uneven benefits, and asymmetrical power relations. Frequently noted are the following concerns:

- The prevalence of English, though driven by the advantages of having a common medium of communication, has the potential to diminish the diversity of languages studied or used to deliver higher education. The widespread use of English may thus lead to cultural homogenization and finding solutions for these adverse impacts, even though recognized, is difficult.
- Global competition may diminish the diversity of institutional models of what constitutes quality higher education. The pursuit of a single model of excellence embodied in the notion of a "world-class university," usually narrowly defined as excellence in research, may result in the concentration of scarce national resources in a few or a single institution to the detriment of a diverse national system of higher education institutions, fit for diverse national purposes. This risk is potentially present everywhere, but is particularly acute for developing countries.
- Brain drain may continue or even accelerate, undermining the capacity of developing countries and their institutions to retain the talent needed for their prosperity, cultural advancement, and social well-being.
- Large-scale international student recruitment, at times using questionable and even unethical practices, may cause a variety of problems, such as brain drain. Also, the presence of large numbers of international students may result in misconceptions about decreased opportunities for domestic students or inadvertently feed prejudice about foreigners. This can overshadow the highly positive intellectual and intercultural benefits that international students bring to the classroom, campus, and communities in which they study and live.

- The growth of transnational programs and creation of branch campuses raises a number of questions including how these enhance the educational capacity of host nations over the long-term, and how able they are to deliver on the promise of an education comparable to that delivered by the sponsoring institution in its home country. A foreign educational presence, with its perceived prestige, has the potential to disadvantage local higher education institutions striving to respond to national needs. Some host nations experience difficulty regulating the presence, activity and quality of foreign programs.
- As the pursuit of institutional reputation, stimulated by rankings, gains in importance among the goals of internationalization, the selection of international partners may be driven more by the desire to gain prestige by association than by actual interest in cooperation. Such a trend carries the risk of exclusion for many important and high quality institutions from international partnerships.
- The asymmetry of relations between institutions, based on access to resources for the development and implementation of internationalization strategies, can lead to the pursuit of goals that advantage the better –resourced institutions and can result in unevenly shared benefits.

In noting these adverse consequences, the inherent value of internationalization of higher education is not being called into question. On the contrary, the goal of raising awareness of these potential risks among the institutions of higher education is to ensure that action is taken to avoid them.

Affirming values underpinning internationalization: A call to higher education institutions

12. The benefits of internationalization are clear. In pursuing internationalization, however, it is incumbent on institutions of higher education everywhere to make every effort to avoid or at least mitigate its potential adverse consequences.

13. The prevailing context for higher education internationalization described in this document requires all institutions to revisit and affirm internationalization's underlying values, principles and goals, including but not limited to: intercultural learning; inter-institutional cooperation; mutual benefit; solidarity; mutual respect; and fair partnership. Internationalization also requires an active, concerted effort to ensure that institutional practices and programs successfully balance academic, financial, prestige and other goals. It requires institutions everywhere to act as responsible global citizens, committed to help shape a global system of higher education that values academic integrity, quality, equitable access, and reciprocity.

14. In designing and implementing their internationalization strategies, higher education institutions are called upon to embrace and implement the following values and principles:

- Commitment to promote academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and social responsibility.
- Pursuit of socially responsible practices locally and internationally, such as equity in access and success, and non-discrimination.
- Adherence to accepted standards of scientific integrity and research ethics.

- Placement of academic goals such as student learning, the advancement of research, engagement with the community, and addressing global problems at the centre of their internationalization efforts.
- Pursuit of the internationalization of the curriculum as well as extra curricula activities so that non-mobile students, still the overwhelming majority, can also benefit from internationalization and gain the global competences they will need.
- Engagement in the unprecedented opportunity to create international communities of research, learning, and practice to solve pressing global problems.
- Affirmation of reciprocal benefit, respect, and fairness as the basis for partnership.
- Treatment of international students and scholars ethically and respectfully in all aspects of their relationship with the institution.
- Pursuit of innovative forms of collaboration that address resource differences and enhance human and institutional capacity across nations.
- Safeguarding and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity and respecting local concerns and practices when working outside one's own nation.
- Continuous assessment of the impacts – intended and unintended, positive and negative – of internationalization activities on other institutions.
- Responding to new internationalization challenges through international dialogue that combines consideration of fundamental values with the search for practical solutions to facilitate interaction between higher education institutions across borders and cultures while respecting and promoting diversity.

15. These values are neither slogans nor vague abstractions. They should be applied in very concrete ways to institutional policy and practice. As institutions develop their internationalization strategies, they should be clear and transparent about why they are undertaking a particular initiative, how it relates to their academic mission and values, and what mechanisms can be put in place to avoid possible negative consequences. Open discussion, within and across institutions and associations and with governments, should keep fundamental academic goals and principles in the foreground, in the context of rapid change, complex realities, and ever-mounting pressures of competition and limited resources.

Next steps

16. This Call to Higher Education Institutions is but a first step in IAU's engagement to collaborate with its Member Organizations and other international education associations and partners to provide institutional guidance and examples of good practice in internationalization. IAU will now turn to helping institutions translate these principles and values into everyday practice.
