Pervasive Internationalization:
A Call to Renewed Leadership

Briefing Notes for the APLU Council of Presidents
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Commission on International Initiatives

Internationalization has been one of the transformational developments in higher education in the past 10-15 years. To remain at the forefront of the world’s institutions of higher education, internationalization must be central to the mission of APLU members. Presidents and chancellors must continue to lead the charge and pursue a strategy of “pervasive internationalization,” cutting across all institutional goals.

Since our 2004 report, A Call to Leadership: The Presidential Role in Internationalizing the University, the need for our teaching, research and engagement missions to be globally informed and connected has profoundly expanded. The mission statements of most APLU member institutions reflect this understanding. Yet, as the world becomes increasingly interdependent and our student population diversifies, we face a new set of challenges. Institutional leadership is still needed to achieve “pervasive internationalization” – driven by a shared vision underpinning the institutional learning, research and engagement missions and engaging all stakeholders.

The Commission has revisited the 2004 APLU report, A Call to Leadership, “taking the temperature” of the state of internationalization in 2016 within the APLU membership, relying on a comprehensive survey of APLU senior international officers as well as interviews with other leaders in higher education. This initiative represents a year-long task force study by the APLU Commission on International Initiatives. The report is directed to APLU’s 237 member institutions, focusing on both the current driving forces for internationalization and the factors for success at APLU universities.

Key Findings

- APLU institutions went through 8-10 years of unprecedented growth in international activities and enrollment. The key strategies pursued include: prioritizing international enrollment, expanding education abroad options, building effective strategic partnerships, developing international opportunities for faculty, internationalizing the curriculum, and establishing collaborative research connections at home and abroad around critical global topics such as sustainability, agriculture, social inequalities, climate, energy, food, water, and one health.

- There is indication that the majority of APLU institutions have now recognized the importance of “internationalization” and embraced it openly. 70% of respondents to our survey have a “high” or “very high” institutional commitment to international activities.
- The report recognizes that internationalization at APLU institutions is still in a “phase of experimentation,” providing an opportunity to capitalize upon innovation in international efforts.
- Based on our survey, over the next five years, top priorities of APLU-member Senior International Officers include in order of prioritization: “internationalization at home,” expanding study abroad, increasing funding for international activities, increasing international enrollment and retention, centralization of international student and scholar services, and developing a comprehensive international strategy.

**Take away for Presidents and Provosts:**

- Presidents are essential for building an institutional climate of support for pervasive internationalization; they can connect internationalization to the core institutional mission and values; they can articulate a bold vision and a set of goals; and they can measure for accountability and reward units for success.
- Presidents provide essential leadership to foster an institutional culture that promotes internationalization as a necessity; they also can combat the view that internationalization takes away resources from our domestic missions and agendas.
- Internationalization primarily driven by expanding revenue through increased international student enrollment is harmful in the long-term. Internationalization needs to be driven by a deeper and broader appreciation of the value of being globally connected.
- Presidents can also assure that “international” has a place at the table for all major university decisions, whether through a senior international officer or other representatives at cabinet-level or council of deans-level discussions.
- APLU institutions need to develop more sophisticated measures of internationalization, moving beyond counting the number of international students, education abroad participants or international events.
- With changing student demographics, institutions need to find better ways to provide international exposure, experience and engagement to first-generation, lower-income students and other non-traditional students.
- Collectively, presidents and other institutional leaders need to advocate that all APLU institutions have a role to play in enhancing connections between the United States and the world for the benefit of all. Leaders must also advocate for national and state policies that facilitate US global engagement.
- Our public universities, among the world’s great research powers, need to take on the global problems that face humanity such as climate change, sustainable energy, poverty, inequality, food security, and gender equity.