The author provides an overview of the increasing internationalization of student services in higher education and examines why student affairs leaders must become more involved in international educational exchange and leadership on campus.

The Significance of International Issues and Responsibilities in the Contemporary Work of Student Affairs

Jon C. Dalton

Why is it important for student affairs leaders to know about international trends and issues affecting higher education and the work of student affairs? What significance do these matters have for the practical tasks of student affairs leadership today? What are the benefits of increased international travel and involvement for the development of student affairs professionals? How will the forces of globalization, including technology, economic integration, and communication, internationalize the work of student affairs in the future? The answers to these questions suggest that the traditional boundaries of the work of student affairs are changing rapidly in the late twentieth century and that involvement in international issues and activities may represent one of the most important new frontiers for the student affairs profession. This chapter discusses the increasing importance of international exchange and experience in the work of student affairs professionals and reviews the specific ways in which the profession is being internationalized.

With the acceleration of international communications, travel, and economic and political integration, higher education leaders around the world are having much more frequent international contact and collaboration. Although faculty have long been engaged in organized international travel and professional exchange activities, student affairs professionals have only recently begun to recognize the importance of international contact and collaboration and the need to incorporate a more global perspective into their work and leadership on campus. Moreover, student affairs professional associations in the United States historically have given only peripheral attention to international issues.
and involvements but are now engaged in much more organized activity to promote international exchange and programming. In this time of expanding global interaction, student affairs leaders are recognizing that they can ill afford to have their institutional leadership and professional roles defined primarily by local campus issues and involvements.

Enhancing Institutional Leadership Effectiveness

In order to be an effective institutional leader today, it is increasingly important that student affairs leaders have experience and knowledge of international developments, especially as they affect major leadership and policy issues in higher education. International travel and experience are important for institutional leadership for several reasons. College presidents, provosts, and academic deans are frequently involved in academic exchange programs, meetings and travel abroad, as well as international recruiting of faculty and students. As a result, they often bring international perspectives and experiences into the leadership culture of their colleges and universities. It is the leadership culture that defines in great part the shared values and experiences that are regarded as important for institutional leadership and that help define leadership competency and credibility. Consequently, it is important for student affairs leaders to have international experience and outlook in order to participate fully in the leadership culture of their institutions. In the past, the work of student affairs has been too often narrowly viewed as a campus-based support function, peripheral to the primary academic mission of the college or university. As international travel, communication, and exchange continue to expand in higher education and in many other sectors of society, it is especially important that student affairs professionals not allow themselves nor their profession to be further marginalized by lack of knowledge and experience in the international dimensions of higher education leadership. In much the same way that student affairs leaders have in recent years embraced new priorities in learning outcomes, fund raising and advancement, and technology, they are also recognizing the importance of gaining international experience and applying international perspectives to their campus work and professional agenda.

International Legacy of Student Affairs Work

College student affairs in the United States is deeply rooted in educational practices and philosophy borrowed from other countries, especially England and Germany. Any attempt to understand the past, present, and future mission and role of student services in the United States must recognize the considerable influence of higher education traditions and practices in other countries on student affairs work in the United States. Student affairs in the United States inherited its foundational ideas and practices from English and German universities, including basic understandings of the mission of higher education and the role and status of students in the higher education setting. Americans
borrowed from early English universities, especially Oxford and Cambridge, a concern for integrating intellectual, moral, and social aspects of student development. This holistic approach to higher education also included a structured oversight of almost all aspects of student conduct and activities in the educational setting. Moreover, the residential nature of early American colleges was modeled on English universities and included a very close monitoring of student behavior and an intentional transmission of core social norms and moral values. The English legacy in American higher education was especially influential in shaping the role and philosophy of student affairs.

The other major international influence on American colleges and universities came from the German research university. In the late nineteenth century, the German university model greatly influenced and altered notions about higher education in America. With its emphasis on research and graduate education, the German university model had a profound impact not only on the mission and organization of American colleges and universities but also on the role and status of student affairs. Because students were older in the German universities, there was much less emphasis on monitoring undergraduate student welfare and guiding personal and social development. The mission of the German research university was to focus more narrowly on intellectual development and discovery of knowledge in the context of a values-free academic ethos. Today, many student affairs organizations in American colleges and universities still reflect an uncertain tension between an approach of actively caring for and promoting student development and a more laissez-faire approach that emphasizes student independence and autonomy in a values-neutral ethos. Indeed, as graduate education has grown in the twentieth century, student affairs organizations have developed a bifurcated mission—one that is focused on the support and guidance of undergraduates and another that is more directly tailored to the special interests and needs of graduate students. One cannot fully comprehend current issues and conditions in student affairs work in American higher education without understanding these international roots and influences. It is a reflection of our own parochialism that we assume the taproot of our profession reaches only to the Harvard yard.

**Popularity of U.S. Student Services Models in Other Countries**

Today, student affairs services and programs are becoming an integral part of widespread international exchange and collaborative activities in higher education. Due in large part to the enormous success of the American model of higher education, educational leaders from other countries have borrowed a great deal from American colleges and universities, including their models of student services and programs. When one travels today in Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, it is common to encounter student service organizational models, programs, and practices drawn directly from U.S. colleges and universities.
The popularity of the American model is no doubt related to the large number of international students and scholars who study in and visit the United States and take home with them their perceptions and experiences about student services. This popularity is also due in part to increasing professional travel to international meetings, as well as to direct access to information about student services through college and university Internet home pages and databases. Increasingly, student affairs leaders are included in institutional planning for international exchange programs, because colleges and universities in other countries are rapidly developing student services as an integral part of their institutional planning and development.

Impact of International Students on Campus

The sheer number of international students studying in the United States makes it important for student affairs leaders to have a global perspective. According to estimates by the Institute of International Education, almost five hundred thousand foreign students study in the United States and each year put more than $7 billion into the economy (“Study Trend,” 1997). In Texas alone, almost thirty thousand foreign students study and help create six thousand full- and part-time jobs for the economy. For many colleges and universities, foreign students represent a very important component of their overall institutional enrollment strategies.

Many U.S. colleges and universities have found that they can easily attract international students and have employed this strategy to enhance enrollments. Oklahoma City University, for example, began to actively recruit foreign students in the mid-1980s. These students now constitute 31 percent of the student body (Arenson, 1997). Boston University has the largest enrollment of foreign students in the United States, with 4,571; New York University and Columbia University have more than 4,000 each. Other campuses, such as the University of Southern California, the University of Wisconsin, and Ohio State University, enroll more than 3,500 foreign students.

To attract international students, colleges and universities are developing innovative approaches to recruiting students from abroad. Arenson (1997) reports that New York University recently initiated a financial assistance program that will allow students from designated countries to borrow from Citibank, Chase Manhattan, or American Express at terms comparable with those in domestic student loan programs. The state of Massachusetts is actively promoting its colleges abroad and offers loans to foreign students.

The presence of so many international students on campus and their importance to institutional enrollment and development strategies make it important for student affairs leaders to be knowledgeable about these students as well as about the international issues and circumstances that affect them.
Global Interests of U.S. Students

Student affairs leaders are also giving more attention to international issues because of the growing number of U.S. students who are taking classes and pursuing experiences with an international component. College students today believe they will have a competitive advantage in jobs and professional advancement by acquiring more knowledge and experience in international travel and education. More than ever before, college students are preparing themselves for a global future by combining international studies with a wide range of college majors. Consequently, it is important for student affairs leaders to be more internationally minded simply to stay abreast of an important educational trend that is influencing American students’ values and career preparation in a more international direction.

More than ever before, college students understand the career advantages of international education and travel, because so many current and future jobs will be tied to the international realm. Bell (1997) reports that in 1995, more than one-fifth of all manufactured goods and agricultural products produced in the United States were exported abroad. More than $800 billion were spent in import and export activities. Bell concludes that “certainly the twenty-first century will be the era of the international worker” (p. 6). Business schools are gearing up for global competition and encouraging students to prepare for careers with an international dimension. The Report of the Global Commission on Global Governance commissioned by the United Nations noted in its 1995 report that “deregulation, interacting with accelerating changes in communication and computer technology, has reinforced the movement toward an integrated global market” (United Nations, 1995, p. 10).

Global Interconnectedness

The global interconnectedness of economies, politics, communications, and travel make it necessary for student affairs leaders, even at the local level, to be “international minded,” if they are to be effective institutional leaders. From a practical standpoint, any serious downturn in international financial markets is felt in the U.S. economy and has ramifications that ripple all the way to individual colleges and universities—through investment portfolios, international exchange programs, and effects on international students. The serious downturn of Asian financial markets in 1998, for example, created many campus problems for U.S. colleges and universities, including the reduction of revenues for operating budgets, as well as financial exigencies for many Asian students studying in the United States. These developments had a variety of human and financial consequences on campus, which directly confronted many student affairs leaders.

Such global interconnectedness will continue to expand in the future, and student affairs leaders will encounter an expanding international dimension to everyday tasks on campus. The use of the Internet, for example, is already
beginning to internationalize the routine communications of student affairs leaders. To be able to communicate directly and instantly with colleagues in other countries and to be able to do so on an ongoing regular basis have the effect of melting international borders and integrating international elements into student affairs leadership.

**International Innovations and Perspectives in Student Services**

Though student affairs professionals are quick to learn about new developments and best practices from their colleagues in the United States, they have been slow to learn about innovations and developments in student services in other countries. Only in recent years have the national meetings of the major student affairs professional organizations begun to give more extensive formal attention to international student services and to encourage interaction with student affairs leaders from other countries. In particular, the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators has initiated several recent projects to give greater priority to internationalizing the profession. These efforts are described in Chapter Three.

Student affairs leaders are not the only college and university leaders who have been slow to recognize the achievements of colleagues in other countries. Madeleine Green (1997) argues that higher education leaders in the United States tend to ignore the experiences of their colleagues in other countries and often fail to recognize the global significance of higher education developments outside the United States. Yash Gupta, dean of the College of Business and Administration at the University of Colorado, describes the isolationism and parochial interests of American colleges as educational “silos” whose walls are everywhere caving in (Schwab, 1997). Internationalism and interdisciplinary instruction are critical, he claims, for the preparation of students for global competition and leadership.

The inward national focus of colleges and universities in the United States is being forced to change because of new communications technology and increasing international contact, created especially by economic and trade agreements. Higher education cooperation in Europe today is perhaps the best example of what the future holds for higher education in the United States. As Europe has moved forward with economic integration and cooperative agreements for study, travel, and work arrangements, national boundaries are dissolving. Under the European Community Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) agreement, for example, students may study in universities in other participating countries with almost seamless arrangements for matriculation, financial aid, and student services. Thousands of European students attend universities in other European Union countries as part of ERASMUS. This very popular international exchange program allows students to attend lectures and classes in the host country, receive additional tuition, and study for periods of between three months and a year. ERASMUS is one of the largest and most varied international exchange schemes in the world (Pritchard, 1996).
Higher education leaders in the United States are also discovering that many universities around the world are encountering problems similar to those experienced in this country. Access to higher education, for example, is a problem for many universities in other countries. University leaders around the world are struggling to finance higher education and provide access to new technology. There is global concern about educating students to take more responsible leadership roles in solving society’s problems and helping create a better life for the nation. The recognition that higher education is the gateway to economic prosperity is increasingly coupled with the conviction that the brightest and best educated must take greater responsibility for social progress and national development. This is especially true in developing countries.

Student affairs leaders do have much to learn from their counterparts in other countries. In Costa Rica, for example, every student at the University of Costa Rica is required to complete three hundred hours of community service for graduation. Moreover, the community service requirement is integrated into the academic curriculum in an interdisciplinary arrangement. Students are required to study in interdisciplinary teams under the direction of a faculty member, and their community service projects must relate to a social issue or problem that spans several academic disciplines. Thus, community service projects not only help address practical community-based problems but also serve to enrich students’ academic study and learning. The institutional importance of service learning is reflected in the fact that an entire division of the university, headed by a vice president, is devoted to this important area of student education and development.

Another example of innovative student affairs services is provided at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in Kingston, Jamaica. In an effort to provide students an opportunity to develop real-world leadership experience as well as to cultivate job placement contacts for its students, the student services staff initiated a unique, applied leadership development program, the “UWI-IBM Quality Circles Leadership Program.” In a partnership arrangement with IBM-Jamaica, the UWI student affairs staff developed an intensive leadership program that includes leadership education and collaboration with IBM leaders in establishing quality circles devoted to applied community service projects.

The leadership program culminates with a year-end banquet in which students present the results of their yearlong programs to an audience of university and community leaders. It is an impressive example of experiential education made possible through the creative efforts of the student services staff at UWI. The program is not only very popular with students but also provides an important university-corporation linkage with the local community.

Of course, many student affairs programs and services in other countries cannot be easily replicated because of unique social, cultural, and political conditions. This is also a common problem in trying to transplant student programs and services among colleges and universities in the United States. But there is much to learn from student affairs activities in colleges and universities in other countries—because they are not constrained by the particular conditions and limitations of American colleges and universities, because they have often been more inventive
in their approaches because of more limited resources, and because many of them have been engaged in these activities for a very long period of time.

One of the most important benefits of interacting with student affairs colleagues in other countries and observing their work firsthand is the opportunity to see one’s own problems and issues from the perspective of other social, cultural, educational, and political settings. Student affairs staff in the United States often fail to recognize the narrowness of their approach to problems and issues because of limitations imposed by their own social, cultural, and political structure and norms. These make it difficult to “think outside the boxes” when addressing problems and seeking solutions.

It can be very revealing to observe how international colleagues address difficult or even intractable problems found in the United States. Often they are not bound by the “invisible” assumptions and dispositions created by our social and political structures and traditions. Student affairs colleagues in other countries sometimes manage to find creative solutions to problems that elude us. One of the great advantages of visiting student affairs operations in other countries and interacting with international colleagues is the opportunity to broaden our perspectives on problem solving and alternative leadership strategies.

Promoting the International Development of Student Affairs

If student affairs professionals in the United States have much to learn from their colleagues in other countries, they also have a great deal to contribute to the international development of student affairs, especially in those countries and institutional settings that have only recently begun to develop this aspect of higher education or have been limited by resources or circumstances. American models of student services reflect great variety and innovation.

The variety and innovation of American student services also reflect the comparative abundance of material resources that colleges and universities have had at their disposal. Student affairs professionals are not likely to view their resources as “abundant,” but compared with the meager support available for student services and programs in some countries, American colleges and universities have been able to make considerable investments in the infrastructure of student services and programs. The long tradition of student services in U.S. colleges and universities not only has resulted in a wide variety of programs and services but also has enabled some student services to achieve such levels of excellence that they are widely regarded as international models.

Knowledge and Awareness of Multicultural Diversity

One of the most important reasons for increasing international contact and communication in student affairs is to enhance our understanding of our own multiculturalism and diversity. Hanson and Meyerson (1995) argue that it is important that a stronger connection be made between global and domestic
cultural diversity in order to take greater advantage of the knowledge and expertise we have developed in both areas.

We have much to learn about our own domestic diversity in particular by closer contact and communication with higher education institutions in Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Canada, and the Pacific Rim countries. These regions have contributed so greatly to our multicultural society and are such an integral part of our own historical legacy that we can benefit greatly from greater contact and understanding of their cultures and traditions. As Hanson and Meyerson (1995) correctly point out, our own focus on domestic multiculturalism will likely spur greater internationalization as we become more aware of the historical and cultural linkages between our domestic diversity and its international roots. Moreover, on most U.S. college campuses, the presence of international students provides one of the most important sources of multicultural diversity and one of the richest resources for educating U.S. students about the complex tapestry of human differences. In Chapter Nine, Dennis Peterson and others examine some of the many ways in which international students and scholars can contribute to multicultural understanding on campus, especially when formal opportunities for cross-cultural communication and interaction are actively encouraged by student affairs leaders.

In the succeeding chapter, Charles Ping examines the international dimensions of student affairs and considers the new role of student affairs from a variety of domestic and international perspectives.

References


Jon C. Dalton is vice president for student affairs and associate professor of higher education at Florida State University. He serves as director of the Institute on College Student Values and is a past president of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.