



diversityabroad

# THE GLOBAL IMPACT EXCHANGE

A Quarterly Publication of Diversity Abroad

FALL 2019 EDITION

ATTRACTING, RECRUITING, AND  
RETAINING DIVERSE TALENT IN  
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION



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# PUBLICATION INFORMATION



## The Global Impact Exchange

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The Global Impact Exchange quarterly publication serves to advance domestic and international conversations around diversity, inclusion, and equity in global education with respect to the thematic focus identified each quarter.

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## Fall 2019 Edition: **Attracting, Recruiting, and Retaining Diverse Talent in International Education**

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How do we find ways to help diverse talent feel welcome and retain them in our offices? How can we better articulate international education as an attractive and meaningful career path for young graduates from diverse backgrounds? Besides entry-level positions, what other entry points to the profession can be leveraged for those with transferable skills? How do we encourage agency among our staff and colleagues to avoid the unfair burden upon colleagues from diverse backgrounds to serve as a representative for their entire community?

# DIVERSIFYING THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PIPELINE: RECRUITING AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR INTERCULTURAL WORK THROUGH GRADUATE PROGRAMS

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As the U.S. international education field becomes increasingly professionalized, graduate programs are emerging as a primary pipeline into the profession. When considering the question of diverse talent in our offices, we must also consider how diverse students are attracted to, recruited for, and retained in graduate programs in the field. A 2018 Diversity Abroad report showed that the demographic profile of professionals in the field mirrors that of education abroad students: overwhelmingly white (71%) and female (79%). Given these demographics—both the participants and the professionals

who work in it—graduate programs must be intentional in their recruiting to gain a diverse student population.

In this article, we discuss the role of graduate programs in diversifying the pipeline into the field. Additionally, we emphasize that graduate programs are ideal locations to train *all* students to be effective members of diverse teams and to work interculturally. This can aid in the retention of professionals from diverse backgrounds in international education and offset the burden on them to serve as a representative for their entire community.

## Recruiting and Retaining Diverse Students

Diversity Abroad (2018) reported that 61.8% of survey respondents held a master's degree. Of the remaining, most held a bachelor's degree with some master's-level coursework. While there has not been any comprehensive data collected on international education graduate program demographics, Espinosa, Turk, Taylor, and Chessman (2019) found that graduate programs in education generally are majority white. Given these facts and the statistics of the professionals already working in the field, we can infer that these graduate programs are also overwhelmingly white and female. The need to diversify graduate programs is clear.



Individuals seeking to enter the international education field often receive advice to attend graduate school as a prerequisite to employment. Financially, graduate-level education is a significant commitment for many would-be students still carrying debt from their undergraduate education or who are not offered adequate financial aid from master's programs, which rarely provide full scholarships. These circumstances disproportionately burden students of color (Espinosa et al., 2019). On a personal level, a master's degree may not even be seen as an option for students who do not "see" themselves represented in graduate programs to begin with. Hurtado (2002) explained that compositional diversity acts as a symbol of an institution's commitment to diversity and found that increased enrollment of Hispanic students in universities also increased the perception that they were welcome. What message are graduate programs sending to those who choose to apply—and to not apply?

Once students are admitted to these programs, universities need to effectively retain them and facilitate their completion of the degree. White students currently make up over half the completion rates of master's degrees in the US (Espinosa et al., 2019). While ample research has been conducted on retention of diverse undergraduate students, more needs to be done to measure retention rates of diverse graduate students, particularly those in the white-dominated education field. To improve retention, universities should utilize alumni networks to facilitate conversations among students and alumni and assess whether the curriculum represents varied cultures and learning styles.

Students are often advised to attend conferences but are offered little support to access them, or to navigate them if they are able to attend. The Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey has recently developed an innovative

"Conference as Curriculum" program to address this (Peterson, 2019). However, the broader profession can do more to provide student-focused sessions or pathways at conferences and make networking accessible to students who cannot afford to travel to and attend professional events. This will help to provide viable pathways into a career for underrepresented populations of students who matriculate into graduate programs in the field.

While increasing student diversity is an important goal of graduate programs, intercultural learning is not guaranteed simply because diverse students are present. In the following section, we offer recommendations for how graduate programs can train *all* students to be culturally responsive in their international education work.

### **Critical Reflexive Practice in International Education**

We argue that international education graduate programs should support students in wrestling with the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Training should include students learning how to adopt critical reflexive practices they can later apply in their professional work. This is important considering the intercultural perspectives embedded in international education and globally focused work. To begin, we suggest that graduate preparation programs should infuse conversations related to positionality and reflexivity in their curriculum. Positionality is an understanding of how one stands in relation to the 'other' (Merriam et al., 2001). Reflexivity works alongside positionality and "is a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 64) in one's work. Together, these concepts help us to consider our responses to the world around us and those we encounter in our practice.

International education graduate programs serve as ideal locations for students to develop their critical lens, which promotes professional growth (Schön, 1983/2017). Landy et al. (2016) found six strategies for incorporating reflexivity into professional and graduate work: reflective writing, experiential learning, classroom-based activities, continuing education, online learning, and strategies that invoked the theories of Paulo Freire and/or Jack Mezirow. International education programs are well suited to adopt these critical reflexive strategies.

Jackson's (2019) Protocol, which uses contextual lenses to help students gain deeper insight and engage in reflective, evidence-based discourse about any given topic, can serve as a starting point for pedagogical design to incorporate these strategies. Incorporating reflexive writing in courses can assist students who are wrestling with their sense of identity and belonging in the world. Experiential learning allows students to become more immersed in the field beyond texts and lectures. Challenging classroom-based activities that allow students to experience breadth and depth in critical scenarios can safely model issues related to diversity and inclusion they will encounter professionally. For graduate students, continuing education can be in the form of webinars/seminars and other related co-curricular learning opportunities that require them to "see" themselves and their potential impact to the field. Online learning is a cost-effective mechanism for program faculty to leverage their existing international networks to develop initiatives that are mutually beneficial to their students and their global partners. Finally, drawing from the works of Freire and Mezirow can help students develop reflexive skills. Freire's scholarship offers guidance on developing critical consciousness while Mezirow's theory of transformative learning can serve as a foundation of a program's course of study. Incorporating these strategies can lead

to healthy and ethical intercultural exchanges for graduate students, preparing them for impactful professional work in international education.

## Conclusion

Graduate programs offering an entry point to the field can position international education as an attractive and meaningful career path for diverse individuals. Both early-career and career-changing professionals can leverage their transferable skills to enter the profession via this pathway. Graduate programs also serve as training grounds, helping to socialize individuals to the profession. With this understanding, critical reflexive practices adopted in graduate programs and continued into professional work can foster the agency among staff and colleagues, regardless of their identity-based backgrounds, to have critical conversations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that is necessary in international education.