



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

*A Quarterly Publication  
of Diversity Abroad*

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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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## Acknowledgments

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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?

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF FACULTY

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**We discuss the need to support graduate international students and students of color in U.S. higher education, an often overlooked group for promoting international education. Drawing from our reflexive writing on our student experiences and our current roles as faculty in an international higher education program, we offer strategies that can foster a sense of inclusion and belonging for diverse students, create support mechanisms for them to succeed, and position them in the international education pipeline.**

## **Reflexive Perspectives on International Education**

Unpacking our experiences in international education as an international graduate student new to the United States and as a domestic undergraduate student of color who did not see studying abroad as a viable option allowed us to conceptualize potential opportunities for faculty engagement. Our insights helped us to unpack the role of faculty in constructing the program environment within which to best attract and retain diverse graduate students.

### **“No one explained to me what graduate education in the US entailed”**

I started graduate school in the US as a “non-traditional-aged” international student, after 14 years in the workforce, in a program related to international education. The college education I received in my country of origin was characterized by an inflexible curriculum, professors we only saw

during classroom lectures and whose authority and infallibly we dared not question. No one explained to me what U.S. graduate education entailed. It was challenging for me to understand the expectations to *critically engage* with the readings and *participate actively* in the classroom. It did not occur to me to reach out to faculty for support, and I did not feel comfortable asking my much younger classmates for help. I watched silently as other students freely expressed themselves and, to my discomfort, challenged each other and even the professors in rapid conversations. The difficult course context and the constant navigation with the classroom process were exhausting. Being much older than the other students and having family commitments at home, I seldom socialized with my cohort, adding to my feelings of isolation. Eventually overcome by a sense of feeling overwhelmed, I decided to quit. I met with my advisor to share my decision and prepared myself to offer an excuse for leaving. At our meeting, to my utter surprise, the faculty praised me for “offering thoughtful and valuable insights” and encouraged me to share more in class. Together



we brainstormed ways to support my learning and participation. I did not drop out. After graduating I completed my PhD, and postdoc, and settled in academia. Perhaps if I had not met with the faculty that day, my narrative would have ended differently.

## Demystifying Study Abroad

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I first traveled outside of the United States for an academic purpose when I was a doctoral candidate. While a first-year student in my higher education doctoral program I had an epiphany that I could combine my academic training and practical experience in higher education with my personal connection to Haiti, my family's country of origin. Soon after, I infused my course of study with internationally centered classes and embedded international perspectives into my assignments. I completed a graduate certificate and research specialization with a global focus and selected doctoral committee members who could help me make sense of the global dimensions of higher education. I eventually traveled to Haiti to conduct my dissertation research on the Haitian higher education system. Now, I am a faculty member in an international higher education program.

However, my path to international education was not certain. As an undergraduate student, I did not participate in study abroad. It did not occur to me that I could. I only knew of two students of color who studied abroad, but despite their travels, I did not believe it was a true option for me. While I saw the signs advertising study abroad information sessions, I did not feel any connection to the opportunities and exciting experiences they depicted. In retrospect, I believe if I was introduced to study abroad in a more purposeful way I might have viewed an international component as an important complement to my collegiate experience. My time in Haiti as a doctoral student speaks to the important role of

heritage programming in study abroad (Pruitt, 2018). Doing so myself helped me to understand the role of faculty who can help to demystify the studying abroad experience for student populations who do not “see” themselves engaged in those types experiences.

## Recommendations for Diverse Student Recruitment and Retention

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Scholarship discusses the important role faculty play in internationalization (Amblee & Dhayanith, 2018; Criswell, 2015; Helms & Asfaw, n.d.; NAFSA, 2011) and supporting students in their international experience. Below we offer recommendations on how to engage students from diverse backgrounds in international education.

## Representation Matters

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Research has revealed a disproportionate ratio of non-white students (45%) to white faculty (24%) on U.S. campuses (Espinosa, et al., 2019). This counters existing research that conveys that faculty who share similar backgrounds with the students they teach can serve as mentors and role models to diverse students. Because graduate education is a pipeline to professional work in international education, the demographic of faculty members must reflect the diverse talent we hope to increase in the profession. However, demographic representation is not enough. All faculty must be able to connect with the diverse students that show up in their classrooms.

## Adjusting Classroom Pedagogy

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Adjusting classroom pedagogies to meet the needs of students is key. Meeting times or “office hours” on syllabi can be understood as “do not disturb me at this time.” We suggest updating

language to reflect “scheduling a time to meet with the professor” rather than leaving it to students’ interpretation. Affirm students’ contributions in class and inquire if they need additional support, as they may not feel confident asking for help on their own. Clarify expectations by providing examples of critical engagement, active participation, group work, and self-assessment. Posting PowerPoint presentations beforehand allows non-native English speakers time to prepare for class discussions. Providing a recap/overview of lectures is another useful strategy.

### **Student-Centered Approach**

Seeking to understand the cultural context of the international students and students of color we teach and advise is important. Providing informal time and space for faculty interaction with graduate students can work toward diminishing barriers students may feel about engaging with faculty, participating in class discussions, or engaging in co-curricular opportunities. Pairing first-semester students with more senior students can open opportunities for them to expand their social network of support. Creating a faculty learning group to address the needs of international students and graduate students of color can respond to the transition, sense of belonging, and persistence of this group.

### **Conclusion**

Faculty play a critical role in developing a climate where diverse students can succeed and are prepared for professional work in our increasingly globally connected community. As such, international students and students of color, indeed all students coming onto our campuses today, expect faculty to bring an international perspective to their practice and be able to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Thus, we argue it is a mandate for faculty to take an active role in attracting, recruiting, and retaining diverse students in international education.

