

Guest Editorial, *Journal of International Students***Enriching American Riches with International Students***Susan C. Pearce, PhD*

East Carolina University, North Carolina (USA)

I first wish to applaud those who gave birth to this journal, which is a timely addition to the scholarly landscape. The increasing presence of international students in the United States is generally under the radar of those who study, advocate, or write about migration or diversity in the United States. And yet, as I have learned through my own research, advocacy, and interactions with international students, this is a group that is *central* to American diversity, and not an afterthought. I say this for several reasons. First, international students often graduate and remain in our countries because they are valued new entrants to our labor market. Only recently has the U.S. Congress recognized this fact by introducing legislation to loosen the visa barriers that many of our high-achieving science and technology graduates face when they attempt to adjust their status.

Second, international students contribute to higher education by exposing us to information and perspectives that we may otherwise have missed. My own international graduate students offer language skills that I do not possess and insights into data sources and academic literature from their home countries. Some of my most memorable teaching moments in class have been stimulated by the contributions of international students who can give their classmates first-hand accounts of the meaning of wearing the hijab in their culture, life under an authoritarian government, or alternative perspectives on textbook histories. I like to quote, with a laugh, a friend's experience in her social work class one day, as they were discussing family life. An international student in the class raised his hand and stated, "In American society, divorce is a *problem*." An American student raised his hand and disagreed: "No, in American society, divorce is a *solution*." This diversity of perspective makes for important educational exchanges. Our students who have the opportunity to study abroad through programs such as Fulbright, as Akli underscores in this issue, become vital players in this exchange as they reintegrate back into their home institutions.

Our own boundaries get stretched by the presence of international students. This year, students at my university got the opportunity to splash colored powder all over each other to celebrate the Indian festival of Diwali. Further, international students open our eyes to an appreciation of our own embarrassment

of riches, such as teaching methods that emphasize analysis, original thought, writing, and critical thinking. As one immigrant woman that we interviewed for the book *Immigration and Women: Understanding the American Experience* asked, why are American universities establishing branches in other countries to teach technical subjects such as math and science in which those countries already excel? She recommends the opposite: that these universities should export our more unique model to the world: "Liberal arts teach you to be educated, to think."

In my recent research and writing on immigration, I insist that we pay more attention to a growing demographic: the cross-border migration of women, who are now the majority of immigrants globally. One chapter in the story is that of higher education. As a result of the global women's movement and other international initiatives, a record number of women are pursuing higher education across the world. UNESCO reports that between 1970 and 2009, the increase in the number of females in higher (tertiary) education was almost twice as high as the increase in the numbers of males (UNESCO, 2012). Women are now in the majority among students in higher education in 93 out of 139 countries (UNESCO, 2012). This tide is not expected to stem. Since nearly one in five students (female and male) who chooses to migrate to another country for her/his university education heads for the United States, it is my country that is among the main beneficiaries of this growing female student population (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012).

There are a number of reasons behind this growth that are related to continued gender inequalities. We interviewed women for our book, for example, who came to the United States because of the educational opportunities that it offered for females, in contrast to their own countries. One was a graduate student from India who moved here to study engineering. Many of these women are graduate students who go on to become professors here in our institutions, contributing to both the gender and international diversity of our educational leaders. We also interviewed several of these women. Such perspectives offer powerful teaching moments in our classes as well. As one of my co-authors reported, several years ago, she asked her new first-year students to introduce themselves in class, and mention what



they plan to do when they graduate. After a series of the expected responses about starting an ideal job or family, one female student, who had been detained for her advocacy for women's rights in her country, announced, "I am going back to Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban."

Even in a resource-rich country like in the United States, a very small percentage of students can afford to travel abroad to attend a university, even for a short time. Recognizing this problem and the value of such exchanges in an increasingly globalizing world, my university, East Carolina University, created the Global Classroom, which uses the latest communication technology to establish video- and computer-linked classroom experiences. The multi-disciplinary Global Understanding courses connect students in more than 40 institutions across more than 24 countries. Such initiatives can work hand-in-hand with the integration of international students, since the courses broaden and deepen American students' understanding of other cultures and of students like themselves in those countries. Among the interesting lessons of these courses is that our students are rarely seeing a monocultural classroom on the other side of the screen. For instance, they talk with Lithuanian, Chinese, and Spanish students who are studying with the British class members in the U.K., and with a Nigerian student in our Chinese partner's class. Thus, this growing phenomenon of studying internationally is presenting itself in unique ways in these types of "virtual" exchanges, which will likely become more common in the future as well (Global Understanding Course, 2012).

Lest our cheerleading for this diversity gloss over the more complex, and sometimes even tormenting, realities of students on the ground, our contributors to this volume offer some eye-opening critical analysis. If we owe a debt to the rich diversity that international students bring to our campuses and classrooms, one of those debts is to pay more attention to their particular needs as newcomers. This includes both more intensified feelings of homesickness and isolation than those of our American-born students, as Onabule and Boes explain in their article in this issue; Jackson and Ray also elaborate on this issue. Roy's article enlightens us about learning difficulties that international students have in the classroom, which professors could address through some simple techniques. When universities and colleges create services and write policies, is the international student perspective at the table? While the answer may have been "yes" for years, if not decades, in the traditional immigrant gateways such as New York and Los Angeles, there are new immigrant gateways across the country that are still getting their feet wet in this regard. In my college years, I do not recall more than one or

two "exchange students" per year—and they were considered exotic, even if they were Europeans. This scenario has changed dramatically, and today diversity is the name of the game across the States.

The important new ground that the research in this issue of *Journal of International Students* breaks can potentially help the institutions of higher education overcome any leftover monoculturalism of the past—and that includes any "gender monoculturalism." Further, it can help those individual newcomers avert crises or manage them when they arise, both to ensure their success for their own lives, and to create enthusiastic ambassadors for our educational institutions worldwide.

### References

- Global understanding course. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/globalinitiatives/course.cfm>
- Pearce, S. C., Clifford E. J., & Tandon R. (2011). *Immigration and women: Understanding the American experience*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- UNESCO. (2012). World Atlas of Gender Education. Paris, France: United Nations. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/unesco-world-atlas-gender-education-2012.pdf>
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2012). Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>

---

### About the Guest Editor:

**Dr. Susan C. Pearce** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at East Carolina University, North Carolina in the United States. She conducts research on the cultural contexts of politics, particularly concerning ethnicity, migration, gender, and social movements in the United States and in European countries undergoing democratic transformations. She is the co-author (with Elizabeth J. Clifford and Reena Tandon) of *Immigration and Women: Understanding the American Experience* (2011), and the co-editor of the anthologies *Reformulations: Markets, Policy, and Identities in Central and Eastern Europe* (2000) and *Mosaics of Change: The First Decade of Life in the New Eastern Europe* (2000). She is currently completing a book manuscript of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the 1989 revolutions in East-Central Europe. E-mail: [pearces@ecu.edu](mailto:pearces@ecu.edu)

\*\*\*

Guest Editorial, *Journal of International Students*

## International Students and Internationalisation of Higher Education

*Erlenawati Sawir, PhD*

Central Queensland University (Australia)

An increasingly diverse population of students leave their home to pursue their education overseas. Data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) indicate that in 2007, three million students worldwide studied outside their home countries (OECD 2009). This global mobility is predicted to increase to 7.2 million in 2025 (cited in Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2009). Leading exporters of international education include such countries as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Bashir, 2007; Choudaha & Chang, 2012). Some universities worldwide enrol a significant proportion of international students' bodies. The enrolment of this student cohort is a response to increasing global competition (Choudaha & Chang, 2012) and is also triggered by the need for universities to source additional income (Stone, 2006; McGowan, 2007). For international students (particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds), an overseas degree has multiple benefits, ranging from the prestige of a degree obtained from an English-speaking country, to improved opportunities for immigration and better prospects of securing a better job and to the generic value of improved skill in the English language itself in business and in life.

What are the implications of student mobility? The presence of international students has transformed the monolithic culture of higher education institutions worldwide into a multicultural one. How institutions are coping with the changed nature of the classroom and with the different needs and expectations of international students become a key issue in international education. It is not an easy undertaking for both international students and host institutions. Entering a new learning sphere, international students may find transition and adjustment difficult. Culture conditions and shapes learning in general and language learning in particular (Gonzalez, Chen, & Sanchez, 2001) hence cultural differences and also prior educational system are believed to have contributed to the social and academic adjustment of international students. Universities are striving to address some of

the challenges teaching international students for example, their language difficulties, adjustment to learning styles in western education and reforming teaching materials to suit the varying needs of the students so as to provide all students with maximum learning opportunities.

The presence of international students also has implications for the development of internationalisation of higher education, a "process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world" (Francis, 1993, p. 5). In the context of internationalisation, the development of intercultural perspectives becomes an integral part of learning in all disciplines (Crichton & Scarino, 2007). To prepare such graduates, institutions have progressed by internationalising the curriculum, for example, by incorporating international elements into the curriculum and teaching and learning activities and by expanding the study of Asian language to facilitate understanding of other cultures (Harman, 2005). Internationalisation of the curriculum incorporates a range of values such as openness and tolerance of other cultures (Webb, 2005). The cultural diversity introduced by international students provides a teaching resource for developing teacher and students' cultural awareness and learning. If diversity is embraced rather than problematized, it can enhance the intercultural leaning of all students and staff. However, there is a serious concern that cultural diversity represented by international students was undervalued and underutilised by local community (Kondakci, et al., 2008; Sawir, 2013). Knight (2003, pp. 2-3) notes that internationalisation is about "relating to diversity of cultures that exists within countries, communities, and institutions". Hence, how cultural diversity can be well exploited has become a compelling undertaking in order to achieve successful internationalisation of the curriculum.

Student mobility is expected to continue and to grow. Institutions enrolling international students have multiple roles not only to maximise the transitional experience of international students but also to ensure



that their presence benefits host institutions and local community particularly local students. More research on international students continues to be fruitful to unpack the complexity of students' transitional and educational experience. At the same time, institutions should work on strategy to ensure that the diversity as part of the global environment of work and learning is recognised and utilised by the local community so as to achieve a genuine internationalisation of institutions.

### References

- Bashir, S. (2007). Trends in international trade in higher education: Implications and options for developing countries. *Education Working Papers*, No. 6. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Choudaha, R., & Chang, L. (2012). *Trends in international student mobility*. Retrieved from <https://www.wes.org/ewenr/12feb/feature.htm>
- Crichton, J., & Scarino, A. (2007). How are we to understand the intercultural dimension? An examination of the intercultural dimension of internationalisation in the context of higher education in Australia. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 30(1), 1-18.
- Francis, A. (1993). *Facing the future: The internationalization of post-secondary institutions in British Columbia*. Vancouver, Canada: British Columbia Centre for International Education.
- Gonzalez, V., Chen, C., & Sanchez, C. (2001). Cultural thinking and discourse organisational patterns influencing writing skills in a Chinese English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) learner. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 25(4), 417-442.
- Gu, Q., Schweisfurth, M., & Day, C. (2009). Learning and growing in a foreign context: Intercultural experiences of international students. *Compare*, 1-17.
- Harman, G. (2005). Internationalisation of Australian higher education: Critical review of literature. In P. Ninnes & M. Hellsten (Eds.), *Internationalizing Higher Education: Critical Explorations of Pedagogy and Policy* (pp. 119-140). Hong Kong, HK: Springer.
- Knight J. (2003). Updating the definition of internationalization. *International Higher Education*, 33, 2-3.
- Kondakci, Y., den Broeck, H. V., & A. Yildirim. (2008). The challenges of internationalisation from foreign and local students' perspectives: The case of management school. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 9(4), 448-463.
- McGowan, U. (2007). Internationalisation of the curriculum: Meeting the challenge of student diversity. Proceedings of the 30<sup>th</sup> HERDSA Annual Conference, 8-11 July, Adelaide Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2007/PDF/S/p234.pdf>
- Organization for Economic Cooperation, Development (OECD). (2009). *Education at a glance*. Paris, France: Author.
- Sawir, E. (2013 in press). Internationalization of higher education: The contribution of International students. *Globalization, Societies and Education*.
- Stone, N. (2006). Conceptualising intercultural effectiveness for university teaching. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(4), 334-356.

### About the Guest Editor:

**Dr. Erlenawati Sawir** is a Research Fellow at the International Education Research Centre, Central Queensland University, Australia. She has completed her PhD in Language and Education at Monash University in 2003. She specialises in sociolinguistics and international education. She has contributed to a number of research projects: investigation of the social and economic security of international students in Australia and in New Zealand; university leaders' strategies in the global environment; university staff understanding of international students and intercultural teaching and learning; Internationalising secondary school education in Victoria; academic staff perspectives on internationalising higher education institutions; and the exploration of domestic student experiences of and responses to internationalisation of higher education in Australia and Denmark. She is co-author of three books *International Student Security* (2010, Cambridge University Press), *Ideas for Intercultural Education* (2011, Palgrave Macmillan), and *Regulating International Students' Wellbeing* (2013, The Policy Press). E-mail: [e.sawir@cqu.edu.au](mailto:e.sawir@cqu.edu.au)

\*\*\*\*