Ethical Internationalization:

Challenges, Frameworks & Responsible Practices in International Higher Education

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Abstract

Higher education institutions around the world are increasingly integrating global perspectives and engagement into their core practices of research, teaching and service. At the same time, the global climate crisis and focus on sustainable development call for attending to issues of global inequality, social justice and sustainability practices.

In light of these priorities, there are a variety of ethical considerations and questions that institutions—including their faculty, staff, and students—must navigate as they seek to practice responsible global engagement. In this presentation, I draw on comparative and international education literature to unpack and problematize the concept of internationalization, introduce three distinct approaches to global ethics, identify promising practices in response to ethical considerations raised by these frameworks, and prompt ongoing reflection among international education scholars and practitioners.

The presentation begins with an analysis of internationalization discourse. Drawing on the work of Buckner & Stein (2019), I examine what is included and excluded in the key documents of leading international education organizations and the implications for ethical practice in the field. I also highlight the tensions inherent within the internationalization imperative and how this relates to changing trends and growing concern with the future of internationalization in the U.S. higher education landscape.

Against this backdrop, I introduce several frameworks for global ethics that have emerged recently in international education literature. These include the liberal, critical and decolonial approaches (Stein, Andreotti & Suša, 2019) and consider their implications for various facets of internationalization, including international student services, education abroad, curriculum internationalization and international partnerships. Furthering the work that Canadian scholars have initiated in this space, I explore the potential for decolonial perspectives to move beyond the modern colonial global imaginary and open space for imagining how we might “address (unevenly) shared problems and sustain human (co)existence on a finite planet” (Stein et al., 2019, p. 25). In particular, I bring this conversation into dialogue with another emerging strand of international education research that considers how internationalization is implicated in the climate crisis and calls for the “greening of comprehensive internationalization” (Blair, 2015; Pashby & Andreotti, 2016).

While acknowledging that any response to emerging ethical dilemmas must be context-specific and wary of universalizing solutions, I conclude by highlighting promising practices that I am exploring in my work as an international higher education scholar-practitioner. These include facilitating collaboration between international and equity/diversity offices, engaging students as partners and exploring opportunities for globally networked learning and virtual exchange. I also highlight the contributions of recently published declarations and statements that seek to affirm and expand ethical practices within the realm of higher education internationalization.