

DISSERTATION

ADVANCING GLOBAL STRATEGY AMID COMPETING INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES
AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES: A STUDY OF SENIOR INTERNATIONAL
OFFICERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

ADVANCING GLOBAL STRATEGY AMID COMPETING INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES: A STUDY OF SENIOR INTERNATIONAL OFFICERS AT LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITIES

This dissertation explores how Senior International Officers (SIOs) at U.S. land-grant universities lead internationalization while navigating alternative institutional priorities and complex external pressures. In an era of shifting political, financial, and global dynamics, responsibility for internationalization often rests with SIOs whose authority, influence, and scope vary widely across institutions. This qualitative study draws on interviews with 15 SIOs and is guided by two research questions: (a) How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?, and (b) How do external forces, such as geopolitical conflict and global pandemics, influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies? The study produced five findings. First, the SIO role is inconsistently defined and highly context specific. Second, internationalization priorities are set through varied and unsystematic approaches. Third, SIOs face institutional obstacles that hinder the advancement of internationalization. Fourth, SIOs are restricted by conditions and policies at global, national, and state levels. Finally, SIOs advance internationalization through pragmatic actions amid the constraints. These findings show internationalization is not a standardized or linear process but an institutionally context-dependent endeavor, constrained by pressures,

shaped by institutional priorities, and carried forward through the pragmatic leadership choices of those charged with advancing internationalization in higher education.

Keywords: internationalization, higher education leadership, senior international officers, land-grant universities, institutional priorities

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Finally, this dissertation took some time for me to complete, with several hurdles and unanticipated impediments to navigate. Along the way, family, friends, and many other people asked how it was going, offered their encouragement, and supported my journey in both small and significant ways. Your kind words carried me forward when determination alone was not enough. Your well-timed check-ins and quiet cheerleading meant more to me than you will ever know. Thank you, all!

DEDICATION

In loving memory of my dad, Don Hoseth, 1943-2024

I still hear the echo of him enthusiastically asking, “How’s your book coming along?”

I finished it dad! But you always knew I would, even when I didn’t believe you.

To my mom,

Judy Mikolich,

thank you for showing me that hard work, perseverance,
and doing things the right way is always the right choice.

To my kiddos,

Noah and Henry,

thanks for letting me do my homework with you.

If I can do this, you can do anything!

To my best friend,

Amy Hoseth.

I could not have done this without you.

I do love you. Always and forever.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The new strategic internationalization plan was complete. My higher education colleagues and I had finally arrived at the end of multiyear effort to outline internationalization priorities for our institution. The details of the plan were developed from in-depth reflections shared within the team and robust dialogue across the campus. The outcome was a detailed document that focused on on-campus initiatives, including the internationalization of the curriculum and innovative revenue opportunities for our division, such as grants and philanthropy. We also made a commitment to prioritizing inclusive excellence, internal HR needs, and work–life balance issues to meet the evolving needs of our staff and community. We developed a dedicated website and unveiled our new strategic plan for the institution at a luncheon replete with balloons, buttons, and buzzing discussion, setting the stage for campus-wide collaboration and engagement to advance our shared interests. We launched the plan with a bang and received high praise for our effort.

Roughly 1 month later, we were instructed to abandon this strategic plan. After several leadership transitions across the campus, an essential new voice in senior leadership had just arrived and promptly assigned our team new internationalization priorities. Specifically, we were told to focus heavily on international student recruiting, increase student enrollment significantly, and invest time supporting an off-campus project of particular interest to the new campus leadership.

Time passed, and we made progress on what we were asked to prioritize. Meaningful structural adjustments and fiscal investments were made to support the new priorities. I was satisfied with our progress and confident we were accomplishing tasks valued by senior

leadership. But what of the earlier priorities that inspired all those balloons? Those were cast aside, as deflated as the luncheon décor.

This episode made me wonder, is this experience common, or was our experience an anomaly? Do others charged with leading campus internationalization have greater autonomy to set their agenda for global engagement? Or is it typical that internationalization priorities be clearly or quietly determined outside the international office for reasons associated with financial, political, personal, or prestigious gain? Leaders of higher education internationalization share a difficult job as they seek to formulate and implement strategic internationalization in the face of internal pressures that can drastically impede their efforts. Unplanned external pressures (e.g., global pandemics, unexpected wars) also scuttle internationalization efforts. Scholars have noted qualitative research topics can emerge from the author's personal experiences and professional interests (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). My interest in engaging in research on the challenges of leading campus internationalization similarly emerged from this personal experience.

The National Landscape of Internationalization in Higher Education

The internationalization of higher education has become a significant priority within higher education, with institutions working to infuse global elements throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Deardorff et al., 2022; Helms et al., 2017; Hudzik, 2011; Rumbley et al., 2012; Soler et al., 2022). According to 43% of respondents, institutions incorporate global engagement as a distinct feature of their mission statement or strategic plan, highlighting the importance of this work in higher education (Soler et al., 2022).

The outcomes associated with the increased attention have been significant in the United States, including massive increases in international student enrollment and participation in education abroad (Martel & Baer, 2021), an elevated emphasis on global content throughout the curriculum (Leask, 2015), expansion of global research (Caruson & Brindley, 2019; Holbrook & Caruson, 2017), the proliferation of high profile administrative initiatives such as strategic partnership development (Gatewood, 2020b; Wood, 2018a; Zagalo-Melo, 2019), and the expansion of robust overseas operations (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Nicolajevic & Di Maria, 2019). The financial rationale for internationalization merits special attention.

The Financial Rationale

One primary rationale for higher education internationalization links to growth in international student enrollment in the United States. The Institute of International Education has monitored student mobility data since 1948 in its annual survey and publication, *Open Doors*. Data for this discussion come from the 2020 edition of the report, including pre-COVID enrollment data up to and including the Fall 2019 term (Martel et al., 2020). The report showed the proportion of international students comprised roughly 1% of all students in higher education in the 1950s and 1960s, growing incrementally to 3% of the total higher education population by the 1990s. In Fall 2019, the number of enrolled international students was 851,957, or 4.3% of all students in U.S. higher education. Approximately 50% of all international students came from just two countries—China and India (Martel et al., 2020). The economic impact of international students at both national and local levels is critical data for professional associations that support international education. For example, NAFSA (2024), the leading professional association for the field of international education, announced that:

NAFSA: Association of International Educators, in partnership with JB International, announced new data today that show that 1.1 million international students at U.S.

colleges and universities contributed \$43.8 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2023-2024 academic year and supported more than 378,000 jobs. The economic activity total is the highest amount ever calculated by NAFSA, eclipsing the high water mark of \$41 billion in 2018-2019 academic year. (para. 1)

The NAFSA website has further broken down the financial impact of international students by U.S. Congressional District, articulating the economic value of and political interest in international student enrollment at a more localized level.

The economic impact of international student tuition has also been valued on campuses, especially those with fiscal challenges (Cantwell, 2015). The growth in international student tuition has been noted as a replacement for revenue lost through financial cuts to public institutions (Green & Ferguson, 2011). Chapter 2, the literature review of this dissertation, contains further exploration of this topic and other rationales for higher education internationalization.

The Role of the Senior International Officer

This emphasis on internationalization in higher education has contributed to the expansion of comprehensive international offices and the rise of a relatively new position in the ranks of higher education leadership—the senior international officer (SIO). The primary role of the SIO is to lead and shape internationalization efforts within an institution (Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Di Maria, 2019b; Merks & Nolan, 2015). Early trailblazers of the SIO role became prominent at the University of Minnesota, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Massachusetts during the 1980s (Goodman & Martel, 2022a). However, the position began to proliferate across higher education in the 1990s and early part of the 21st century (Goodman & Martel, 2022a). Most U.S. institutions are now involved in international activities, such as studying abroad or enrolling international students. As such, many U.S.

institutions have identified an international leader to guide and support these international activities.

SIOs are often tasked with advancing and supporting many disparate activities at institutions. The legacy responsibilities associated with internationalization center on the needs of international students and visiting scholars and advancing education abroad, formerly referred to as study abroad (de Wit & Merkx, 2012, 2022). However, the responsibilities of the SIO often extend well beyond these two familiar roles, now often including internationalization of the curriculum, cocurricular learning, global partnerships, advancing faculty research and scholarship, and managing overseas operations (Deardorff et al., 2022; Di Maria, 2019b; Merkx & Nolan, 2015; Punteney, 2019). Please refer to Chapter 2 for an in-depth overview of SIO responsibilities.

The SIO often shares responsibilities with other academic and administrative divisions, advancing the international element of a broader institutional priority such as student recruiting and admissions, academic affairs, student affairs, and research (Di Maria, 2019b). As a result, the role of the SIO is embedded with collaborative opportunities, which sometimes also create conflict (Merkx & Nolan, 2015). For SIOs to successfully advance internationalization, they must collaborate with their campus stakeholders (Dietrich, 2019). Campus stakeholders can include senior internationalization leadership, boards, presidents, provosts, vice presidents and vice provosts, deans, faculty, staff, and students.

The preferences of each of these individuals can impose pressure on the SIO. One notable example is the pressure from senior administration to increase enrollment and tuition revenue from international students. As noted earlier, the trends for institutions to focus on financial opportunity are difficult to ignore and figure prominently into an SIO's public or private

expectations (Cantwell, 2015; Choudaha, 2017b; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Punteney, 2019).

Other preferences of senior leadership may include the elevation of rankings or other prestige markers (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Shin et al., 2011), expansion of overseas activities and facilities (Wilkins, 2020), or other administrative activities that support entrepreneurial priorities (Deschamps & Lee, 2015).

The role of the SIO has grown significantly over the last 30 years (Goodman & Martel, 2022a). The position intends to assign “a legitimate authority stemming from their positions, experiences, and expertise to shape one or all aspects of internationalization strategy” (Di Maria, 2019a, p. 3). However, this authority can be challenged when they face pressures and are expected to address the competing priorities of the president, administrative colleagues, and faculty. The successful SIO must formulate and implement strategy while navigating these internal tensions from diverse stakeholder interests. In addition, SIOs must navigate the external challenges of operating in a complex and unpredictable global environment.

External Factors Impacting Internationalization

The internationalization of higher education also exists in a broader global context, with frequent exogenous activities regularly affecting internationalization. The arrival of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020, bringing the internationalization of higher education to a standstill, serves as a stark reminder of the power of external events to disrupt campus internationalization efforts (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Martel, 2020; Soler et al., 2022). De Wit and Altbach (2020) wrote:

Internationalization is a constant evolution process that changes in response to local, national, regional, and global environments. Current global trends appear more radical than in the past and require more substantial attention and international cooperation than ever; nationalist–populist movements, the need for climate change, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly vital. (p. 17)

Beyond COVID, scholars have noted the prevalence of nationalist tendencies from electorates and political leaders worldwide. Nationalism preferences local concerns over the ideals and opportunities of globalization (Bieber, 2018). President Trump’s popularity in the United States, Brexit, and electoral victories in Brazil, Southeast Asia, and throughout Europe are markers of a worldwide trend leading to a deglobalization of society (Bremmer, 2018).

These nationalist trends have been amplified during data collection in 2024 and data analysis during the initial year of President Trump’s second term. The United States has a well-documented past of anti-immigration sentiment (Arnold, 2011). However, current fervor against immigrant populations has reached new heights, never before seeing “the hostility towards immigrants been quite so widespread, and quite so nasty” (Dauvergne, 2016, p. 1). Anti-Asian acts of racism have been on the rise (Garza, 2023), along with a rise of Islamophobia (Akel, 2021). The United States–Mexico border was a major issue in the 2024 Presidential election, with increasing anti-immigration sentiment ultimately favoring President Trump (Oppenheim, 2024). Scholars are starting to imagine a higher education context where nationalist and anti-immigrant tendencies in the United States may have a chilling impact on global engagement (Brøgger, 2021; Schildermans, 2023). Although this dissertation was largely conducted before the second Trump Administration, authors in 2025 are already noting or anticipating a continuation of this trend (Kimmage, 2025; Logan, 2025; Madaboyina, 2025).

Arguments have been made that the global pandemic accelerated nationalism and deglobalization (Irwin, 2020; Su & Shen, 2021) and that an increase in nationalism inhibits the ability of higher education institutions to engage globally (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Brøgger, 2021; Ross, 2022). In addition to nationalism, rising international tensions and global conflict are growing concerns. Ukraine, the Gaza Strip, and China present an array of complications for

international students and global engagement connected to these areas. Please refer to Chapter 2 for additional discussion of these external factors.

SIOs have been charged with advancing internationalization strategies while facing a complex and evolving global environment. These global challenges have impacted international student recruiting and enrollment, interest in students studying abroad, interest in faculty engaging with global partners, and the overall appetite for an institution to engage in international work. These external pressures, coupled with the internal pressures noted earlier, have made it exceedingly difficult for the SIO to shape an internationalization agenda.

Statement of the Problem

The expanding role of internationalization presents both opportunities and challenges for higher education. These efforts are increasingly led by SIOs, who are expected to design and implement comprehensive internationalization plans (Nolan, 2018). However, these planning efforts must be developed with internal pressures and external realities in mind. At the institutional level, SIOs face conflicting priorities from diverse internal stakeholders. SIOs also are constrained or pressured to act in specific ways based on fiscal or institutional realities that affect internationalization. Externally, SIOs must navigate an increasingly complex world influenced by geopolitics, shifting national and state policies, global pandemics, and even violent conflict that may interrupt internationalization efforts.

The SIO is charged with advancing an internationalization agenda for its team and the campus it serves. SIOs must know how internationalization will be valued in their institutional context, understand the institutional commitment, plan effectively, operationalize the plan, review plans and activity regularly, and reinforce success as it occurs (Knight, 1994).

Internationalization efforts must also be nimble to address evolving external factors. SIOs who do not fully incorporate these internal and external factors in their planning may be unsuccessful.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to explore the phenomenon of higher education internationalization, and specifically, how SIOs charged with advancing the internationalization of their campus formulate and implement internationalization strategies while navigating diverse stakeholder interests and priorities at the institutional level while simultaneously reacting to the complex and evolving global context that impacts internationalization activity. The objectives of this study were to:

- Explore how SIOs charged with advancing internationalization at higher education institutions establish internationalization priorities for their campus.
- Explore how the views and preferences of internal institutional stakeholders, notably the university president and provost, other senior administrators, faculty, and staff, are incorporated into or influence strategic planning and internationalization prioritization.
- Explore how fiscal pressures, including revenue opportunities and the realities of fiscal limitations in higher education, influence strategic planning and internationalization prioritization.
- Explore how external pressures globally, such as geopolitical conflict and the coronavirus global pandemic, influence strategic planning and internationalization prioritization.

This study aimed to address this issue at a pivotal time for internationalization. The dissertation addressed a critical gap in the literature by collecting data from and giving voice to

SIOs who are charged with advancing internationalization initiatives in higher education. The dissertation's findings provided practical insight for current and aspirational SIOs, offering examples that may support internationalization strategic planning and implementation in other contexts. Finally, the qualitative data from this study may help reveal the rough contours of a new era in the internationalization of higher education and offer salient ideas for future study.

Research Questions

This study explored how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization initiatives while managing complex challenges and diverse priorities within the institution and worldwide. The primary research questions for this study were:

1. How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?
2. How do external forces (e.g., geopolitical conflict, global pandemics) influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies?

Significance of the Study

This dissertation was designed for current and aspirational leaders interested in campus internationalization in higher education in the United States. The significance of this qualitative research study was to shine a light on the challenges of internationalization strategic planning and prioritization, including the sensitive intersection of internationalization and revenue. I explored whether leaders of campus internationalization feel they have agency and authority to advance their own internationalization agenda. The findings from this study are meaningful for current and aspirational leaders of higher educational internationalization, who may be unaware

of the unspoken expectations placed on SIOs. This study also fills a gap in literature, providing current research on the phenomenon of leadership in higher education internationalization.

Researcher Positionality

As my lens permeates the study, the reader of this study needs to know about me, my experience, and my worldview. I am a globalist. I was drawn to international things at a young age through the privilege of world travel while singing in a youth choir. When I was 13, our choir traveled to several European countries one summer, staying with host families in several cities. During one of the last nights of the tour, I was assigned to a host family in Copenhagen with limited English-speaking skills. The family and I sat in compulsory silence in their well-appointed living room, smiling aggressively at each other while trying vainly to communicate. My fervent prayers to miraculously acquire the ability to speak Danish went unanswered. I filled the silence by glancing around their room and noticed a handsome marble chessboard in the corner. It was a showpiece, and I feared it might be a family heirloom.

I found the courage to finally point to it and signal that I was familiar with the game. I played chess with the family's patriarch for the next several hours. That night was a brief moment in the history of my life. Nevertheless, I was awestruck that we lived on opposite corners of the planet and could only communicate through hand gestures. However, we created a genuine connection that night over that marble chessboard. I wondered at that impressionable age if, despite vast differences in geography, language, appearance, political systems, and culture across peoples worldwide, perhaps there is more that connects us than we realize.

That formative experience has led me to explore the world and its people. This is a path upon which I continue to wander. I have earned multiple degrees in international affairs and have spent my professional career advancing international engagement in higher education,

government, nonprofit associations, and the private sector. My professional career has been dedicated to fostering positive engagement for individuals across borders, and the research questions for this dissertation were designed to further my curiosity on how to do this work well.

In my current professional role, I am a higher education administrator advancing internationalization at a land-grant institution in the United States. I am not currently the SIO, but I have been privileged to enjoy a front-row seat watching the work of SIOs. I hold individuals in this role in high regard. During my career in international education, I have had substantive roles overseeing international partnerships, international student enrollment, international student and scholar services, education abroad, intensive English programs, academic initiatives, faculty development, a Confucius Institute Chinese language learning center, and several other significant international initiatives. I actively contribute to international education through writing, conference presentations, and service. I care deeply about the work of international educators and want our field to thrive and make a meaningful impact on individuals and communities worldwide. These experiences have informed my lens as I approach this study, and I acknowledge I am personally and professionally invested in this research topic.

I have other salient identities that impact my worldview. I was born in and have lived most of my life in the United States, although I have been privileged to visit 30 countries and lived abroad for a year during my undergraduate years. I was born in the 1970s, consider myself a child of the 80s, and entered college in the 90s at the close of the Cold War and the dawn of a new era of globalization. My parents were schoolteachers and impressed on me the importance of education and public service. I am married to a higher education librarian, and we are raising two children with the hope they will each contribute positively to the world. I have personal views on other issues, including politics, public diplomacy, economics, international relations,

and beyond. I acknowledge my lens and lived experience are present in the background of this research study.

I am a White, cis, heterosexual individual. The sex assigned to me at birth was male, and I use he/him pronouns. The professional field of international education is dominated by individuals who identify as White. The pervasive Whiteness throughout the field is a problematic issue that has its roots in several systemic impediments that prevent non-White candidates from joining the ranks of internationalization professionals. First, the field of international education tends to prefer job candidates who have either studied abroad or have had substantial travel experience in a manner comparable to the privileged experiences in my biography. I have observed this expectation of travel can be a barrier to entry for some candidates. Second, international students who come to the United States might be viewed as a viable applicant pool for this field. However, they are impeded from working in higher education after their careers. Visa requirements that prevent postgraduate employment make this problematic (McFadden & Sedorff, 2017). Finally, the U.S. government requires designated school officers, a role often given to international student advisors, to enter and access data into the primary government data system called SEVIS, must hold U.S. citizenship or permanent work authorization (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). This has created yet another barrier to entry to employment in the field. As a result, the professionals who support and lead campus internationalization are predominantly U.S. citizens and predominantly White, like me (Kwai, 2017). Although this dissertation does not center on race and other identities as a primary research question, I attempted to be mindful of my identities throughout the completion of this dissertation.

Finally, regarding my approach to scholarly research, I hold a constructivist worldview and align with the writing of scholars who believe there is no singular truth (Crotty, 1998;

Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Instead, I believe that truth is contextual and individualized. As a researcher, I have worked to shed light and explore varying perspectives on my research topic.

Approach to the Study

Drawing from the work of qualitative research scholars (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this study used a basic qualitative research methodology to explore how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies in the face of competing internal priorities and global pressures. The dissertation was framed as a constructivist study, with the researcher seeking to cocreate knowledge with participants. Participants included 15 SIOs currently or recently employed at U.S. land-grant institutions. Data collection featured in-depth semistructured interviews. Chapter 3 contains a detailed overview of the methodology for this study.

Two theoretical frameworks were central to the study. The first theoretical framework for this study was academic capitalism. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) first introduced academic capitalism as “institutional and professorial market or marketlike efforts to secure external moneys” (1997, p. 8). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) further wrote that higher education has increasingly shifted toward an academic capitalist regime. The theory of academic capitalism helps explain how universities integrate with globalization and neoliberalism (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). Higher education institutions are now considered marketers, and institutions engage in new investment, marketing, and consumption behaviors that link them with the new economy. The theory of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) illustrates how individual institutions act as sellers, students are individual consumers, and a series of private transactions for personal gain drive the field of higher education. Several researchers are similarly using academic capitalism as a lens to explore the internationalization

of higher education (Kettler, 2018; LaFleur, 2018; Washburn, 2014). Given the increasing pressures to generate revenue through internationalization (Cantwell, 2015), academic capitalism was a lens that has permeated this dissertation's data collection and analysis phases.

The second theoretical framework, the internationalization cycle, was developed by Knight (1994) as a tool to help internationalization leaders design and develop an internationalization strategic plan. The internationalization cycle highlights six significant elements, including campus awareness, campus commitment, planning, operationalizing the plan, review, and reinforcement (Knight, 1994). The model provides a comprehensive lens for internationalization strategic planning and is a valuable theoretical framework for this research topic. The six elements of the internationalization cycle were used to develop the discussion topics during semistructured interviews. Please refer to Figure 1 for a visual depiction of the internationalization cycle. Chapter 2 includes additional literature on this dissertation's theoretical frameworks.

Definitions of Key Terms

The purpose of this section is to define key terms for this study. The research question for this study is centered on the following key terms: *higher education*, *internationalization*, *land-grant institution*, and *SIO*. These terms may be unclear or have varying interpretations.

Higher Education

For this study, the term *higher education* follows the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), a framework used to organize education levels. The ISCED includes nine educational levels, ranging from early childhood education (Level 0) to doctoral degrees (Level 8). This paper uses the broadest possible definition of higher education, encompassing ISCED

Levels 5–8, covering nondegree tertiary education, undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral levels, respectively (UNESCO, 2012). The paper centered on internationalization in higher education and does not address the internationalization of other industries or entities.

Internationalization

The internationalization of higher education is a fluid phenomenon, with practices and priorities changing over time (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Kezar, 2018). Unsurprisingly, scholars have provided many definitions (de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2011; van der Wende & Kalvemark, 1997). My definition of internationalization for this dissertation is as follows:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of postsecondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and make a meaningful contribution to society. (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29)

This definition is highly cited by scholars and practitioners across the field. Chapter 2 reviews of scholarship on the evolutionary nature of *internationalization* in a higher education context, along with various definitions of the term.

Land-Grant Institution

The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (n.d.) defined land-grant as:

A land-grant college or university is an institution designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890, and 1994. The original mission of these institutions, as outlined in the first Morrill Act, was to teach agriculture, military tactics, mechanical arts, and classical studies so members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education. (para 1-2)

Certain institutions have been explicitly designated as land-grant institutions as of 1862, 1890, and 1994. The original institutions noted in 1862 focused on agriculture and an extension of knowledge to communities, and they sustain a research-oriented focus to this day; 16 historically black colleges and universities were added in 1890, and tribal institutions were added

in 1994 (Croft, 2019). The participants for this dissertation were drawn from the 1862 list of land-grant institutions, noted in Appendix A.

Senior International Officer

The Association of International Education Administrators is a primary professional development association for leaders of higher education internationalization. They were established to support senior international officers (SIOs) and currently define a SIO as “those who are leading comprehensive internationalization at their institution” (AIEA, n.d.). I acknowledge the acronym SIO is a contested term in international education (Di Maria, 2019b). At some institutions, international responsibilities are assigned to multiple individuals in various divisions or across several colleges, implying there could be several individuals with senior leadership responsibilities at an institution. This dissertation does not contribute to the debate on the definition of SIO and follows the straightforward definition provided earlier centered on leadership of internationalization activities.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 has provided introductory information, the study’s purpose, problem statement, research questions, and the researcher’s perspectives. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature, including the theoretical frameworks for this dissertation, a historical perspective on the evolution of internationalization over time, scholarship on the current state of internationalization and the tasks that typically align with this field, the rise of the SIO, and current global contextual challenges to internationalization including COVID. Chapter 3 provides a detailed overview of the methodology for this research study. Chapter 4 of the dissertation provides a detailed review of the findings, centering excerpts from the participants. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the

findings through the lens of the literature and theoretical framework, implications for policy and practice, recommends areas for future research, and shares conclusions from the study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered an introduction to my dissertation on the internationalization of higher education. The chapter provided information on the internal and external pressures that SIOs face while formulating and implementing internationalization plans, a statement of the problem, and presented the research questions for my dissertation. The dissertation used a basic qualitative methodology to delve deeply into the experiences and perspectives of SIOs who lead comprehensive internationalization in the face of competing internal priorities and complex global environments. This chapter also highlighted the significance of the study, provided definitions of key terms, shared a statement of the researcher's positionality, and outlined the organization of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of existing scholarship relevant to my dissertation on how senior international officers (SIOs) at land-grant institutions in the United States formulate and implement internationalization strategies in the face of competing internal priorities and a complex global environment. The literature review has been designed and presented with several goals in mind.

First, I have situated my dissertation within the body of scholarship that broadly addresses the internationalization of higher education and literature on leadership in higher education internationalization specifically. The phenomenon of and scholarship about higher education internationalization is relatively young (Punteney, 2019); however, the topic has gained traction in recent decades. Journals (e.g., the *Journal of Studies of International Education*, the *Journal of International Students*, and the *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education*) have been established to support this body of work.

Professional associations, including NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Association of International Education Administrators, Institute of International Education, and American Council on Education, are also active in publishing studies, articles, and books designed for practitioners who advance the internationalization of higher education. Scholars have also developed robust literature reviews on the phenomenon (Bedenlier et al., 2018; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Kehm & Teichler, 2007).

As a second goal, as an international education practitioner, I chose to elevate the voices of those who identify as scholar-practitioners within this literature (D'Angelo & O'Brien, 2023; Streitwieser & Ogden, 2016). I honor those who have invested their time and intellect to write on

this phenomenon, and I pay homage to those who work to bridge both the practitioner and scholarly lens in their writing. Lastly, Terrell (2016) noted, “Qualitative researchers take an inductive approach and do not require a hypothesis to guide their study. They tend to have much shorter reviews of the literature so as to allow the literature to evolve from the interviews . . . and other artifacts they rely on as data” (p. 46). As a qualitative research study, this review of literature is presented with this methodological choice in mind.

This literature review chapter is organized into five sections. In the first section, I start with a scholarly overview of the two theoretical frameworks that guide the dissertation. As introduced in Chapter 1, the theoretical frameworks for this dissertation are academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997) and the internationalization cycle (Knight, 1994). I introduce the two frameworks and offer examples of how each has been used in prior studies. In the following section, I address the historical context of higher education internationalization, dating back to the Middle Ages. A complete historical account exceeds the bounds of this literature review. However, by presenting this historical snapshot, I seek to illustrate how literature shows that higher education trends, priorities, and activities have shifted to meet the local and global context of the time.

In section three, I explore the term *internationalization* more deeply, starting with scholarship on the many definitions of and perspectives on the term. I continue with an exploration of internationalization rationales. I focus on empirical studies exploring faculty motivations and senior administrators’ rationales, highlighting that literature shows how institutional stakeholders can have conflicting goals. This section reinforces that institutional perspectives on internationalization are varied and can be contradictory, putting pressure on the SIO.

In section four, I focus on the role of the SIO. This section introduces literature on the development of the position. Additionally, I synthesize the array of responsibilities that currently fall to SIOs, as described in the literature and recent publications. The section illustrates that internationalization is neither static nor uniformly understood, allowing for diverse thoughts on internationalization priorities and activities. The approach to this section also signals that SIOs are responsible for far more than revenue generation on their campuses. In the final section, I turn to the global context in which the internationalization of higher education is currently situated. I specifically introduce literature and several empirical studies on the internationalization of higher education during and after the COVID era as a proxy for the complex global environment in which internationalization is situated.

Theoretical Frameworks

My dissertation explored the internationalization of higher education and, specifically, the complexities that SIOs face when designing and implementing internationalization strategies in the face of competing internal priorities and a complex global context. Two theoretical frameworks were foundations of this study, each serving as an essential lens throughout the study's data collection and analysis phases. The two theoretical frameworks were academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle.

Academic Capitalism

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) first introduced *academic capitalism* as “institutional and professorial market or marketlike efforts to secure external moneys” (p. 8). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) further wrote that higher education has increasingly shifted toward an academic capitalist regime. I contend that any introduction of academic capitalism appropriately begins by addressing neoliberalism, referred to as “the defining political economic paradigm of our time”

(Chomsky, 1999, p. 7). Neoliberalism is characterized by commercialization, privatization, and deregulation. In the United States, the defunding of higher education from public sources, with corresponding increases in funding through private revenue generation, has become neoliberalism's hallmark (Shahjahan, 2014). In neoliberalism, higher education is no longer seen as a communal and societal good; instead, higher education is viewed as a privately consumed commodity (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Neoliberalism in action through the lens of higher education internationalization, characterizes international students as consumers of a product, namely attaining a higher education degree (Kauppinen, 2012; Kauppinen & Cantwell, 2014). Scholars have explored this phenomenon of international student growth through a neoliberal lens. Raby and Zhang (2020) reviewed literature focusing on the theoretical perspectives used in scholarly writing related to international students. The authors reviewed 143 journal articles written between 2009 and 2019 from a sample of 17 higher education journals. They mapped theoretical perspectives found in literature, grouping the theories into four theoretical paradigms: neoliberalism, humanitarian, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. The authors conclude that neoliberalism is a common paradigm used by scholars interested in this topic.

The theory of academic capitalism helps explain how universities are complicit with neoliberalism (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). Higher education institutions are now considered marketers, and institutions engage in new investment, marketing, and consumption behaviors that link them with the new economy. The theory of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) illustrates how individual institutions act as sellers, students are individual consumers, and a series of private transactions for personal gain drive the field of higher education.

Academic capitalism emerged as a scholarly framework (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) that illustrates how the lines between the public and private sectors have blurred. Initial research on the theory of academic capitalism centered on intellectual property and patent policies, entrepreneurial practices surrounding privately funded research, public–private partnerships, and athletics (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Researchers are also exploring academic capitalism’s effect on internationalization, including international student enrollment (Cantwell, 2015) and dual degrees (LaFleur, 2018).

Literature on internationalization over the last 20 years frequently finds that revenue has emerged as a significant motivation for institutions of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cantwell, 2015; Choudaha, 2017b; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Glass & Lee, 2018). The public defunding of higher education forces institutions to pursue revenue from new sources. This dynamic permeates higher education today (Giroux, 2002) and compels institutions to place an increasingly important emphasis on revenue generation.

With internationalization seen as a revenue-generating activity, many U.S.-based institutions pursued international student enrollment in this spirit of academic capitalism during the first 20 years of the 21st Century (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2012). For example, one research study from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) showed international students often paid full nonresident tuition at research-intensive public institutions in the United States (Bound et al., 2016). The authors of the NBER study argued this large number of students paying a high tuition rate essentially offset the reduction in funding from state governments at many research-intensive public institutions. A 2015 analysis by SelfScore, a company providing financial services to international students, also found international students pay a higher proportion of tuition than their domestic counterparts. The study concludes, although

international students comprised just 12% of the student population of their sample, these students paid 28% of the total tuition (Loudenback, 2016).

Other aspects of modern-day internationalization align with these revenue tenets, including internationally sourced research funding, fundraising, establishing branch campuses, and funding staff professionals through fees and other external funding mechanisms (Knight, 2012). The theoretical framework of academic capitalism and the practical impact of using internationalization activities to increase institutional revenue are critical lenses that permeate this dissertation.

Internationalization Cycle

Knight (1994), one of the leading scholars on higher education internationalization, shared this observation several decades ago:

A question facing many colleges and universities is how to translate what seems to be a solid commitment to internationalization into a comprehensive but practical strategy that integrates and institutionalizes the international dimension into the university system and values. (p. 11)

She presented the internationalization cycle as a framework to help institutions develop and implement an internationalization strategy across an institution. The internationalization cycle serves as the second theoretical framework for my dissertation. Please see Figure 1 for a visual representation of the internationalization cycle.

Figure 1

Internationalization Cycle



The internationalization cycle features six primary elements. The first area focuses on general *Awareness* of the campus's importance and benefits of internationalization. The second is *Commitment*, which can include concrete and symbolic demonstrations of commitment from senior administration, the broader faculty community, and staff. Next, *Planning* recognizes the vital process of developing a comprehensive internationalization strategy appropriate for the campus. The fourth element is to *Operationalize* the strategic plan. Knight highlights the importance of identifying fiscal and staff resources to help operationalize the plan successfully. The fifth element is the ongoing *Review* of the plan to assess and enhance internationalization

efforts. The sixth and final element is the *Reinforcement* of internationalization through rewards and incentives that foster a sustained culture of global engagement. The internationalization cycle is intentionally not linear but instead a circle or cycle of activity that is perpetually iterative and ongoing.

Several scholars have similarly used the internationalization cycle as a framework for their research studies. Childress (2010) authored a study and subsequent book to help understand how the academic activities, organizational practices, and organizational principles employed in two institutions affected faculty engagement in operationalizing internationalization plans. Even approaching the 30th anniversary of the development of the International Cycle, scholars use the internationalization cycle to explore internationalizing campuses in the ASEAN region (Tanhueco-Nepomuceno, 2019), faculty research in Brazil and China (Gokbel, 2020) and internationalization in the United States (Morena, 2023).

Because the International Cycle was designed to help SIOs plan and implement strategic internationalization plans for higher education institutions, the framework has been at the foundation of this dissertation's data collection and analysis phases. Specifically, questions and discussion topics during the semistructured interviews were derived directly from these six elements of the internationalization cycle. The internationalization cycle also served as a lens through which data analysis was conducted. The theoretical frameworks of academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle complement each other well, have been used in prior relevant studies, and are present throughout this research study.

Internationalization in a Historical Context

The internationalization of higher education has existed for centuries (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Zaman & Mohsin, 2014). Scholars have traveled the world teaching and learning dating

back to the Sophists of 445 B.C. (Welch, 1997), through the Middle Ages (Altbach & Teichler, 2001) and colonial era (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). This section shows internationalization's presence and long-standing importance within higher education and introduces key trends, motivations, and outcomes of internationalization over time. As Mestenhauser (2023) wrote, "International education cannot be solved or completed because it is constantly changing and must be kept active and adapted to new situations" (p. 75). The evolutionary nature of internationalization further illustrates how the phenomenon has a history of shifting in reaction to local and global contexts.

Internationalization in Ancient and Colonial Times

Higher education, at its core, has always been an internationalized institution. As Altbach (1998) noted, "With its roots in medieval Europe, the modern university is at the center of an international knowledge system that encompasses technology, communications, and culture" (p. 347). Several institutions claim to be the oldest continuing institutions of higher education around the world, including the University of Bologna in Italy, starting in 1088 AD (Bonomini et al., 1994), the Yuelu Academy at Hunan University in China, starting in 976 AD (Foo & Fang, 2016), or the Al-Azhar University in Egypt starting in 970 AD (Radwan, 2016). These institutions and those that followed became magnets for knowledge and academic pilgrimage (De-Ridder Symoens, 1992). It would be inaccurate to call these efforts international, as the nation state would not exist for several centuries (Britannica, n.d.). However, throughout the Middle Ages, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment periods, some individuals participated in the "natural, not organized or regimented, flow of culture, and of free wandering of the creators of that culture across political frontiers" (Kolasa, 1962, as cited in de Wit & Merkx, 2012, p. 44). The global engagement and exploration of teachers and learners is not a new phenomenon.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, a significant outcome of higher education internationalization was exporting higher education systems to other countries. The United States is a prime example of this movement, with England's Oxford and Cambridge higher education systems serving as the backbone of the initial U.S. colonial universities such as Harvard and Yale (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). The German research university would be similarly exported into the United States, evolving into today's flagship research institutions and land-grant universities (Cohen & Kisker, 2009). European institutional systems were also exported into their colonial contexts, with the British system expanding into India, Africa, and the Caribbean, and higher education in Latin America modeled after the Spanish system (de Wit & Merckx, 2012). Scott argues that this export of higher education models is best described as "academic colonialism" (Scott, 1998, p. 124).

Several specific examples illustrate this trend of academic colonialism during this period. In India, British colonial rule led to the establishment of English as a primary language for communication. In 1800, Fort William College was also established in Calcutta to provide language training to British military and security forces (Roebuck, 2013). Ironically, as the role of the East India Company declined in the region, the school became a leader in regional language instruction, including the translation of books from Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu into English. The school closed in 1854.

Dr. William Clark, the third president of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, was invited by the government of Japan in 1876 to assist in the launch of a new agricultural school (Maki, 2002). The institution was modeled after the U.S. land-grant system and was the first institution in Japan to offer formal degrees upon completion. The university, now called Hokkaido University, continues to use Dr. Clark's image and original motto of "Boys, be

ambitious!” as primary symbols of the institution. Intersections between colonization and higher education existed in other parts of the world as well, notably in Africa (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013) and Latin America (Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2023).

As higher education was emerging worldwide, centered on exporting systems from other countries, the flow of individual students was actually discouraged (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). The rise of the nation state across Europe during the American and French Revolutions period gave way to nationalist tendencies that impeded the global flow of students. Halpern (1969) noted “Jefferson and Webster opposed sending young Americans to study abroad because they shared a common distrust of European Ways and because they feared American students would become denationalized” (p. 17 as cited in de Wit & Merkx, 2012, p. 46). As nationalist movement are reemerging in current times globally, these historical trends may reemerge (Zezeza, 2017).

Internationalization in the 20th Century

The 20th Century would become a significant turning point in the internationalization of higher education. The post-World War I era, marked by the launch of international organizations such as the League of Nations, catalyzed noteworthy international education organizations that exist today, including the Institute of International Education in the United States in 1919, DAAD in Germany in 1925, and the British Council in 1934 (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Student mobility grew with the launch of institutional exchange agreements across Europe and U.S. institutions (de Wit & Merkx, 2012).

Scholars (de Wit & Merkx, 2012; Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Mestenhauser, 2023) have noted the importance of World War II cannot be understated, as the devastation and aftermath catalyzed a new call for global engagement, with the United States as a newly minted leader on the world stage. After World War II, internationalization gained steam and importance as

foundations and government entities began funding international affairs and language centers at select institutions (Mestenhauser, 2023). The U.S. government embraced an intentional strategy to use international educational exchange to advance hegemonic leadership (Dolby & Rahman, 2008), intending to produce qualified staff for diplomatic and international business positions (Mestenhauser, 2002).

Internationalization can be used for political purposes (Buckner & Stein, 2020), which was certainly the case during the post-World War II period. This was particularly true in the United States, as European institutions took longer to recover from the war. A notable achievement of this era was the development of the Fulbright program, a well-known international exchange program. Named for the sponsor of the enacting legislation, U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright, the program allocated “proceeds from sales of surplus war property for the promotion of international goodwill through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science” (Himes et al., 1988, p. 1). The exchange program had several outcomes, including establishing international faculty-to-faculty relationships, placing international students in U.S. institutions due to those relationships, and expanding outbound study abroad programs for U.S. students (de Wit & Merckx, 2012).

Internationalization in the 21st Century

As we enter the next century, institutions began to experiment, with some focusing on student mobility, faculty mobility, and international partnerships (Hudzik, 2011). Others viewed internationalization as focused on foreign language programs, on-campus curricular programs, or on-campus cocurricular or student-centered programs and services (Knight, 2012). As noted earlier, as government support for higher education began to wane, some institutions viewed

internationalization as a lucrative way to generate needed revenue (Cantwell, 2015; Rumbley et al., 2012).

With this growth of experimentation, professional associations also began to author, develop, and refine recommended practices for international education. The American Council on Education created an updated Model for Comprehensive Internationalization (ACE, 2022). The model outlines six key pillars that comprise an effective, comprehensive internationalization strategy, including an articulated institutional commitment; administrative leadership, structure, and staffing; curriculum, cocurriculum, and learning outcomes; faculty policies and practices; student mobility; and collaboration and partnerships. A comparable model was produced and updated by NAFSA, the leading professional association for international education (NAFSA, 2015) focused on comprehensive internationalization, student mobility and partnerships. NAFSA (2022) refined its effort by creating the International Education Professional Competencies 2.0, highlighting 12 competences important for staff professionals engaged in internationalization. The 12 competencies in alphabetical order are (a) business acumen; (b) communications; (c) compliance management; (d) data collection and analysis; (e) inclusion and equity; (f) leadership; (g) people development; (h) program development and delivery; (i) recruitment, enrollment and advising; (j) relationship cultivation; (k) risk assessment and crisis management; and (l) teaching, learning, and facilitation. Internationalization has been present in higher education for centuries but has evolved to meet the realities of the moment. Given this phenomenon's evolutionary and varied understandings, how do scholars define the term internationalization in this context?

Internationalization Perspectives and Rationales

This section features a review of scholarly definitions of and perspectives on the term *internationalization*. This contested term is ripe for continued reimagination as global and local circumstances evolve. My rationale for highlighting multiple views on internationalization in higher education is to demonstrate the broad range of perspectives on this phenomenon, underscoring the complexities for those charged with leading these efforts in higher education.

Definitions and Perspectives

There is little congruence on what the term *internationalization* actually means (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Crăciun, 2020). Mestenhauser (2023) once described this situation by writing, “We do not have international education but many versions, each defined differently, so that—as they say—‘anything goes’” (p. 79). Knight (2014) agreed by lamenting, “Internationalization has become a catch-all phrase used to describe anything and everything remotely linked to the global, intercultural or international dimensions of higher education and is thus losing its way” (p. 76). This lack of a shared definition is a shortcoming for scholars and practitioners alike, leading to multiple and, at times, competing perspectives on what internationalization is intended to accomplish. In light of the challenges, many scholars have attempted to develop an acceptable definition of internationalization in the context of higher education (Zaman & Mohsin, 2014).

After reviewing the literature, including comprehensive literature reviews on this topic (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Kehm & Teichler, 2007), I present five themes in literature that represent a mix of both traditional and more recent definitional approaches to internationalization as *an inventory of activities*, *a process*, *a response to globalization*, *a path to advancing social justice*, and finally *internationalization with adjectives*,

An Inventory of Activities

Internationalization is regularly associated with diverse activities in higher education (Arum & Van de Water, 1992; Deardorff et al., 2012; Di Maria, 2019a). Some activities focus on student experiences, such as studying abroad (Berquist, 2019), international student recruiting and admissions (Di Maria, 2017; Housley, 2019), or learning experiences in the curriculum (Leask & Charles, 2018). Other activities center on faculty research and publication (Bedenlier & Zawacki-Richter, 2015; Caruson & Brindley, 2019; Proctor, 2015), alumni engagement (Raman, 2019), or other institutional priorities (Childress, 2009; Seeber et al., 2016). These international activities serve different audiences, are situated in different places across an institution, and can be implemented worldwide (Deardorff & Charles, 2018). Despite the significant variety in scope, each of these activities belongs under the common category of internationalization (Deardorff et al., 2012).

Arum and Water (1992) defined internationalization as “the multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation” (p. 202). Early written definitions of the term focused on the student-centered activities most associated with internationalization, such as studying abroad, international students studying in the United States, and foreign language classes (Marden & Engerman, 1992). Scholars centered the work of faculty in these early definitions because of their primary role as teachers and scholars (Ellingboe, 1998). As internationalization became more prevalent in other higher education activities, definitions evolved to reflect these changes, including connections with global research (AUCC, 1995) and developing institutional strategy (de Wit & Knight, 1999).

A Process

Knight (1994) shifted from an activities-based orientation and defined internationalization as the “process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the institution’s teaching, research and service functions” (p. 7). Additional scholars offered their variation on this process lens, defining internationalization as

a change process from a national higher education institution to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competencies. (Söderqvist, 2002, p. 29)

With this definition, Söderqvist (2002) claimed an internationalized institution is inherently different, having experienced a change process that resulted in a distinctly different type of institution from its preinternationalized existence.

Nearly 10 years after her initial definition, Knight (2003) provided an updated definition, writing internationalization is “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (p. 2). With its emphasis on postsecondary education’s purpose, function, and delivery (Knight, 2003), this revised definition expands beyond the earlier and more narrow focus on teaching, research, and service from 10 years earlier (Knight, 1994). This revised definition is the most oft-cited definition of internationalization in the field (Bedenlier et al., 2018).

Lee (2021) offered a provocative update to Knight’s definition focused on process. Lee noted that internationalization features an embedded power imbalance within its structure, especially when one looks at institutionalization across different regions of the world. For example, Teferra (2020) argued that “the definition of internationalisation, as it stands, does not concur with these basic tenets of intentions, rendering it somewhat irrelevant to most of the Global South.” (p. 157). With a systemic power imbalance in mind, Lee proposed the inclusion

of power in Knight's definition as "the *power* and process of integrating and international, intercultural or global into the purpose, function or delivery of postsecondary education." This definition provides an important new lens on the definition, aligning with other scholars who have observed internationalization is far more than a set of institutional activities.

A Response to Globalization

Some scholars (Schoorman, 2000; van der Wende & Kalvemark, 1997) have been critical of centering internationalization at the individual or institutional level and instead argue that internationalization should be defined as a reaction to societal globalization. For example, internationalization is "any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets" (van der Wende & Kalvemark, 1997, p. 18). Another scholar similarly wrote internationalization is "an ongoing, counterhegemonic educational process that occurs in an international context of knowledge and practice where societies are viewed as subsystems of a larger, inclusive world" (Schoorman, 2000, p. 5).

These definitions situate internationalization as something beyond the institution, both impacted by and participating in the external forces of globalization. Altbach and de Wit (2015) further captured the spirit of this concept:

In the 20th Century, politics and global ideological struggles dominated the international agenda worldwide. Academic cooperation and exchange have been in many cases . . . the main way relations between nations continued to take place and even were stimulated so as to pave the way for further contacts . . . even though we should be realistic that international cooperation and exchange are not guarantees for peace and mutual understanding, they continue to be essential mechanisms for keeping communication open and dialogue active. (p. 9)

A Path to Advance Social Justice

As higher education has increased its focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (DEIJ) (Berger, 2020), a new community of scholars is beginning to redefine

internationalization through this DEI lens. Some wrote that internationalization “should be understood as an approach to ‘encountering difference’ and perhaps, as a way to ‘encounter difference *differently*,’ that opens up possibilities for examining and reexamining biases, stereotypes, and hegemonic assumptions about ways of being and knowing” (Buckner & Stein, 2020, p. 164). The University of Minnesota launched the Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative to put this definitional approach into practice at their institution (University of Minnesota, n.d.).

The social identities of people impacted by internationalization are rarely explored (Buckner & Stein, 2020). Domestically and abroad, students are imagined as homogeneous, nonimmigrant, and nonindigenous, ignoring local differences and the uneven relations that have produced them (Roshanravan, 2012). Against this backdrop, scholars (Wick & Willis, 2020; Yao & Viggiano, 2019) wrote that internationalization is rooted in a neoliberal and neocolonial agenda, suggesting, “Critical analysis of the underlying rhetoric for the internationalization of higher education reflects neoliberal agendas that are inherently colonial and contrary to the espoused values” (Wick & Willis, 2020, p. 15). Yao and Viggiano (2019) similarly connected the dots between White supremacy, colonialization, and internationalization when they stated, “Because the global system of education is rooted in the intersections of dominance and subordination within Western and White supremacy, international students and scholars are mere commodities in the United States’s self-serving interests for global prestige and dominance” (p. 105).

Internationalization With Adjectives

This literature review has highlighted various efforts to define internationalization, but a consensus definition has yet to emerge. Crăciun (2020) wrote, “In response to this challenge,

scholars have tried to underscore the historical development and ever-changing nature of internationalization by increasing the analytic differentiation of the concept” (p. 156). Crăciun highlights a trend among scholars to define internationalization as a category of activity, also known as *internationalization with adjectives*. Examples of this definitional approach include internationalization at home, comprehensive internationalization, and intelligent internationalization.

Internationalization at Home. An early definition of *internationalization at home* (IaH) defined this term as “Any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility” (Crowther et al., 2001, p. 8). IaH spotlighted internationally oriented academic efforts, programs, services, and bilingual faculty presence in the on-campus experience (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Nilsson, 2003). IaH has been present in literature and practice for decades, emphasizing the internationalization of the curriculum (Landorf et al., 2018; Leask, 2015). IaH called on institutions to ensure that “all students develop international competency through internationalized curriculum and opportunities for learning beyond the campus” (Brewer & Leask, 2012, p. 249). As the coronavirus global pandemic brought international travel to a virtual standstill (Martel, 2020), scholars focused more intensely on internationalization at home efforts (Fragouli, 2020; Zapp & Lerch, 2020).

Comprehensive Internationalization. Returning to the discussion of internationalization as an inventory of activities, as early scholars debated the mix of activities that best defined internationalization, Mestenhauser (2002) called on scholars and higher education leaders to think about internationalization as more than a collection of student learning programs. He wrote,

In order to achieve internationalization, universities would have to develop concepts and structures to institutionalize and integrate international education in their governance and

policies. . . . They would have to establish realistic goals for a systemic, comprehensive, multidimensional and interdisciplinary program affecting every part of the system. (p. 171)

His approach conceptually argues that internationalization should be viewed as more than a set of policies and activities and should be a significant priority that permeates every aspect of an institution.

Hudzik (2011) carried this view further by establishing a framework of *comprehensive internationalization*, which he defined as “a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise” (p. 6). Comprehensive internationalization has been increasingly used as a framework for dissertations and research studies (Griffin, 2017; Hu, 2018; Hudzik & McCarthy, 2012; LaFleur, 2018) and has spawned its progeny, including pervasive internationalization (APLU, 2017) and intelligent internationalization (Rumbley, 2015).

Intelligent Internationalization. Rumbley (2015) introduced the adjective *intelligent* into the literature, writing, “Intelligent internationalization demands the development of a thoughtful alliance between the research, practitioner, and policy communities” (p. 17). Whereas comprehensive internationalization centers the institution, intelligent internationalization centers faculty alongside the growing number of higher education staff professionals engaged in internationalization (Rumbley, 2020). This new concept has led to a wave of new scholarship, beginning to imagine intersections between intelligent internationalization and faculty (Reisberg, 2020), service and community engagement (Sutrisno, 2020), and higher education policy (Helms, 2020).

Definition for This Study

This collection of literature on various definitions is a series of mirrors, reflecting each author's time, place, and priority. Definitions initially focused on critical global activities. As the range of activities evolved and society became increasingly globalized, scholars revised and reinvented definitions to align with the emergent rationales of the moment, including a more recent focus on social justice. These reactive and ever-evolving definitions are problematic. For example, the coronavirus global pandemic had a tremendous impact on internationalization, scuttling study abroad (White & Lee, 2020) and international student enrollment (Schulmann & Trines, 2020), with some predicting the damage will last for many years to come (Mitchell, 2020). However, the existence and impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic do not change the fundamental nature of what internationalization aspires to accomplish.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I prefer a more consistent view of internationalization that remains salient across various political, economic, and social moments. I prefer a broad and stable definition of internationalization, allowing institutions and individuals to engage in work that seems most appropriate for the contexts and rationales in which they operate and without a caveat for the global condition at the time. Throughout this dissertation I used the following definition, which views internationalization as a process with a purpose:

The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of postsecondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and make a meaningful contribution to society. (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29)

This definition is relevant in conflict or stability, economic growth or contraction, and across multiple contexts and cultures. Given these multiple perspectives on internationalization, and the challenges of coming to a commonly accepted definition, some scholars have focused on individual and institutional rationales that foster or provoke internationalization to occur.

Rationales

Much has been written on motivation (Ford, 1992), specifically in a higher education context (Austin & Gamson, 1983; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; van Lankveld et al., 2017). Scholars have also explored faculty motivation in specific areas such as service learning (Abes et al., 2002), community engagement (O'Meara, 2008), and research mentorship (Morales et al., 2016). Literature and empirical studies show individuals within U.S. higher education are motivated by different rationales to engage in internationalization activity in higher education (Dewey & Duff, 2009; Glass & Lee, 2018; Nyangau, 2018). Research studies have explored a wide array of motives, from the desire of administrators to advance institutional goals (Jones, 2019) to the desire of faculty to build interpersonal connections and advance the impact of their research agenda through global connections (Friesen, 2013; Nyangau, 2018).

Faculty Rationales

Some suggest internationalization is the purview of the faculty, as it is typical for higher education faculty to infuse a curriculum with global themes (Brewer & Leask, 2012), research and publish with partners in other countries (Walker, 2019), have strategic partners worldwide (Zagalo-Melo, 2019), and compete for a global talent pool of scholars and students (Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Glass & Lee, 2018; Wood, 2018b).

Dewey and Duff (2009) were among the first to empirically study faculty views on internationalization in higher education. Faculty in the School of Architecture and Allied Arts (A&AA) at the University of Oregon were tasked with developing a new internationalization plan. Dewey and Duff used this exercise as a case study to help administrators gain insight into faculty perspectives on the goals, strategies, and internationalization processes. The authors explored how the faculty of A&AA defined, conceptualized, and mapped internationalization,

experienced barriers to internationalization, and perceived structures, systems, and personnel that encourage faculty involvement. Dewey and Duff found more than passion is needed to motivate faculty. Instead, they concluded internationalization requires resources, support, and strategic coordination; it must be addressed systemically and systematically and take on the form of an individual-institutional partnership. Their study acknowledged the partnership between faculty and administration in campus internationalization but neglected to explore faculty motivation in this process.

Agnew (2013) took a different approach, examining how faculty members think about internationalization in the context of their respective disciplines. Agnew's research questions focused on descriptions and perceptions of internationalization, the participants' experiences in international education, and the importance of internationalization to their students and campus. Curricular issues were of particular interest to Agnew in her research. Using analytic induction to identify themes and patterns, she found disciplinary knowledge reflects real-world differences in subject matter relative to internationalization. She also found variances in academic discipline and institutional culture affect how faculty members think about internationalization. Agnew's observation that different disciplines can approach internationalization in different ways opens doors to new research studies, and her emphasis on curricular matters also opens new avenues for study on the perception of faculty around other activities, such as research, international students, and overseas teaching assignments.

Friesen (2013) focused specifically on faculty motivations for international engagement. Friesen engaged in a qualitative, phenomenological study to develop an understanding of the motivations for internationalization at the faculty member level. The study also compared faculty motivations with institutional rationales, as outlined in strategic planning documents, to see if

institutional strategies influenced faculty engagement. Friesen found there needed to be a clearer understanding of internationalization. She also found differences in perception about internationalization, with institutional strategy seemingly focused on quantitative outcomes, such as increasing international student enrollment.

In contrast, faculty focused on qualitative outcomes, such as the value and importance of personal relationships. The author also found the participants' focus on relational goals often emanated from personal experiences or people who inspired them to participate in an international opportunity. Friesen finds that personal relationships are a key motivator, and her findings illuminate the importance of intrinsic motivation in faculty.

Finally, Nyangau's (2018) study examined intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of faculty engagement in internationalization. His participant group included 15 faculty from a large public research university in the Midwest who worked in human services and health professions. He selected participants who were known to be involved in activities with international dimensions. Nyangau used in-depth semistructured interviews and a constant comparative data analysis method to center the voices of faculty. Research questions focused on the predominant intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for international engagement.

Nyangau found faculty articulated varied rationales, including the desire to facilitate and enhance student learning, prepare global citizens, commit to issues of personal interest, and increase the reputation of academic programs. Enjoyment and personal fulfillment were the most mentioned intrinsic rewards, whereas recognition, opportunities to travel, and building international networks were the most commonly cited extrinsic rewards.

Others have brought different lenses to this research question, using quantitative analysis (Almeyda & George, 2018; Finkelstein & Sethi, 2014), researching this question in international

contexts (Li & Tu, 2016; Yemini & Giladi, 2015), and deepening the exploration of rationales and barriers to faculty internationalization (Calikoglu et al., 2022). As a whole, the literature suggests that faculty motivations to engage globally are highly contextual, based on geographic and political contexts, economic context, institutional context, tendencies within an academic discipline, and the intrinsic motivation of some faculty to extend their individual teaching or research work into a global sphere. Where international work is valued and supported, and the barriers to global engagement were minimized, faculty are more inclined to work internationally to advance their personal and professional interests.

Administrator Rationales

How do the motivations of senior administrators differ from or align with the motivations of faculty? *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses*, also called the Mapping study, is a signature research study by the American Council on Education that helps explore this question (Soler et al., 2022). The Mapping study aims to assess global engagement at American colleges and universities, analyze progress and trends over time, and identify current and future priorities. The data for the longitudinal study were initially collected in 2000 (Siaya & Hayward, 2003), with the latest version as the fifth iteration, each published in 5-year increments. Across all iterations of the study, the survey addresses six key areas of higher education internationalization: institutional commitment and policy, leadership and structure, curriculum and cocurriculum, faculty and staff support, partnerships, and mobility.

Data collection for the 2021 Mapping Survey was initially collected from chief academic officers and provosts starting in March 2021. This population is distinct from the faculty-oriented studies in the prior section. Ongoing follow-up through February 2022 was extended to additional campus staff leaders, including SIOs, institutional researchers, presidents, vice

presidents for student affairs, and chief diversity officers, to receive one response from each participating institution. ACE received 903 valid survey responses, representing an overall response rate of 23% (Soler et al., 2022).

Several noteworthy findings emerged from this study. First, respondents were asked to identify the primary reasons for internationalizing their campus. The presentation of the data included responses from 2011, 2016, and 2021 versions of the survey to share longitudinal adjustments to the responses. The top rationale cited was *improving student preparedness for a global era* across all three survey versions. However, there has been a slight decline in respondents selecting this reason over time. Conversely, the following three reasons for internationalizing the campus grew over each survey iteration. The second response was *to diversify students, faculty, and staff*, an area of noted priority in higher education (Berger, 2020; Wick & Willis, 2020).

The third response was *to become more attractive to prospective students*, and the fourth highest response was *to generate new revenue for the institution* (Soler et al., 2022, p. 9). Respondents were asked to identify their priority activity for internationalization in a separate question. The top priority across all three survey iterations was *recruiting international students* (Soler et al., 2022, p. 11). Finally, in a question asking about future priorities, 63% of respondents said that *recruiting international students* was the top anticipated priority of the future, followed by 51% selecting study abroad for U.S. students, and then 27% selecting internationalization of the curriculum (Soler et al., 2022, p. 16). The response from this study affirms the presence of academic capitalism in higher education internationalization and reinforces the revenue-oriented and international student enrollment rationale for internationalization referenced throughout this dissertation.

Returning to another finding from the Mapping Survey, one question also asked which position on each campus was a vital catalyst for internationalization. Across all institution types, the *faculty*, *president*, and *SIO* rose to the top, each noted by approximately 45% of the respondents. However, when disaggregated by institution type, the SIO was recognized as a critical catalyst at doctoral and master's institutions, at 80% and 75%, respectively. Faculty followed in each category but was much lower in the 45–50% range, with presidents and chief academic officers in the 40% range (Soler et al., 2022, p. 22). The faculty and president were comparatively higher at associate and special focus schools than at doctoral and master's institutions. According to this survey, this finding implies that administrators drive internationalization strategy more than faculty, especially at doctoral and master's institutions. These responses, although not universal across all institutions of higher education, also signal the importance of the SIO as a significant catalyst for the internationalization of higher education.

The SIO

As internationalization has gained greater attention in higher education during the 21st Century, the presence and influence of staff leaders charged with advancing internationalization have also grown. As teams of staff have grown, it has become increasingly commonplace to identify a single leader to serve as the head of the international office or division, to shape strategy, and to serve as the leading voice for global engagement at an institution. This relatively new cadre of internationalization leadership professionals are called SIOs (Di Maria, 2019a; Merks & Nolan, 2015).

Unfortunately, there is no dedicated or comprehensive effort to count the specific number of individuals who identify as SIOs. However, the U.S. Government does monitor the number of schools that host international students, which serves as a meaningful illustration of how global

engagement permeates the higher education system. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) writes that, in 2021, 6,322 colleges and universities hosted at least one international student in F-1 visa status, the most common way international students enter the United States for academic purposes (ICE, 2021a). DHS also lists the 500 universities with the most international students (ICE, 2021b). For example, New York University tops the list with 21,453 international students, and in 500th place on their list is Johnson and Wales University with 370 international students. The report further states that 66% of institutions host between 1 and 50 international students (ICE, 2021a). The DHS data suggest, of the over 6,000 institutions in the DHS system, several thousand higher education institutions educate international students. Given this extensive list of institutions with active international engagement, it is reasonable to expect that many institutions would identify someone to be a leader of internationalization efforts on their campus (Di Maria, 2019b). Future studies may seek to explore the specific number of SIOs in the United States.

Overview of the SIO

The SIO often reports directly to provosts and presidents (Helms et al., 2017; Kwai, 2017) and is tasked with establishing and implementing institutional internationalization priorities (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Nolan, 2018; Soler et al., 2022) and overseeing the staff who support these tasks (Charles & Pennywell, 2018; Deardorff & Charles, 2018). The Association of International Education Administrators is the leading professional development association for leaders of higher education internationalization. They exist to support internationalization leaders, and they define the SIO as “those who are leading comprehensive internationalization at their institution” (AIEA, n.d.).

This definition raises an important question: What are the specific activities comprising this comprehensive internationalization approach? Prior sections of this chapter have illustrated how the activities associated with the internationalization of higher education are disparate and wide-ranging, spread across virtually every aspect of higher education. To both capture this breadth of responsibility and to provide a written roadmap to SIOs who lead these complex activities, authors are publishing entire books on leading higher education internationalization efforts (Deardorff et al., 2022; Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Di Maria, 2019b; Merks & Nolan, 2015; Puntene, 2019).

Responsibilities of the SIO

The following section reviews SIO responsibilities gleaned from these books and additional literature. Di Maria (2019a) developed a helpful table outlining SIO responsibilities; his work is recreated in Table 1 (2019a, p. 5).

Administration

SIOs are typically responsible for managing and leading teams to advance strategic internationalization efforts for their institution (McQuaid & Klahr, 2018). At larger institutions, the responsibilities can include managing large and growing professional staff and faculty teams. For example, I currently work with the Office of International Programs at Colorado State University, an R-1 land-grant institution. We have over 60 staff members organized across seven teams named General Operations, Education Abroad, International Enrollment Center, International Student and Scholar Services, Programs for Learning Academic and Community English, Strategic and Academic Initiatives, and Todos Santos Center (CSU, n.d.). Smaller

Table 1*Functional Areas of Responsibility for SIOs*

Responsibility area	May include
Administration	Budgeting; ceremonies and events; facilities; fundraising and development; international alumni relations; leadership; management; mentorship; policy development and enforcement; staffing; and strategies
Community outreach and partnerships	Advocacy; civic, government, institutional, and private sector partnerships; hospitality and protocol; intercultural communication; international agreements; professional associations; public speaking; sister city programs; and World Affairs Councils
Curriculum and cocurriculum	Accreditation; area and global studies programs; campus and community events; virtual exchanges; curriculum integration; foreign language programs; learning outcomes; residential learning communities; and student organizations
Education abroad	Direct enroll; exchanges; dual-degree and joint-degree programs; faculty-led programs; internships; service learning; transfers of credits; and visas and stay permits
Global operations	Foreign campuses, centers, and sites; counterintelligence; crisis response; foreign bank accounts foreign licensing and registration; foreign offices; foreign workers; insurance; legal compliance at home and abroad; risk management; taxation; and transnational education
Intensive English program	Accreditation; curriculum development; assessment; special programs; bridge programs; English for academic purposes; and English for specific purposes
International enrollment management	International admissions; international student recruitment; foreign credential evaluation; global brand management; international marketing and communications; and overseas advising and counseling
International research and scholarship	Contracts and grants; export controls; foreign licensing; global academic rankings; and performances
International student and scholar services	Immigration compliance; nonresident alien taxation; predeparture and orientation programs; retention programs; and services for dependents
Other	Continuing education; Confucius Institutes; online education; and research centers and institutes

institutions often feature one-person offices (Reinig, 2016). The one-person international office is familiar enough that NAFSA, a significant professional association for international education, has developed a Member Interest Group dedicated to individuals who do not manage large teams.

Along with personal management, the administrative function of the SIO can include managing the fiscal matters associated with internationalization (Lutabingwa, 2019). As noted throughout this dissertation, SIOs are encouraged to advance new schemes to increase international tuition for an institution (Kacenga, 2019; LaFleur, 2018; Sandberg, 2017). The role of the SIO leans toward the entrepreneur, both on behalf of the institution and the international office (Charles & Pynes, 2018; N. Cruz, 2019; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Pynes, 2018). This focus on funding has also led some SIOs to become increasingly involved in administrative functions connected with alum engagement for global brand elevation, grant writing with international partners, and fundraising (Merkx, 2018; Raman, 2019).

As a final note on Administration, SIOs are typically responsible for developing and implementing the strategic international plans at their institution and advocating for internationalization to be present within the institution's strategic plan (Agnew, 2013; Childress, 2009; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Nolan, 2018). The American Council on Education states that "Internationalization requires priority in an institution's strategic plan" and further states the importance of dedicated leadership, such as the SIO, to be responsible for this effort (ACE, 2022). As many as 43% of institutions note that internationalization is specifically highlighted in the institution's mission and planning documents (Soler et al., 2022).

Community Outreach and Partnerships

As the primary staff professional engaged with international issues at a higher education institution, the SIO is often responsible for engaging in the community and throughout campus on global topics and opportunities (Bogenschild & Latz, 2018; Stiegler, 2019). Di Maria (2019b) referenced that SIOs may be called on to connect with local organizations, such as the World Affairs Council, to share information and updates regarding the institution's global

engagement. Developing an inventory of other local organizations, such as Rotary Clubs, library organizations, and other community groups, is also recommended (Gallegos, 2020). In communities with Sister Cities, the SIO, on behalf of the institution, may guide partner activities with international institutions located in the partner city, advancing student, staff, or faculty exchange (Heyl & Tullbane, 2012)

Higher education institutions also create international partnerships with other institutions worldwide (Gatewood, 2020b; Sutton et al., 2012). The types and purposes of the partnership vary (Hoseth & Thempapillai, 2020). However, they may advance student exchange, international student enrollment, faculty collaboration, joint research, overseas teaching, consulting, or support other activities (Banks et al., 2016; Sutton & Obst, 2011; Zagalo-Melo, 2019). These partnerships often require a formal document, typically called an International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU), to frame the partnership activity. In partnership with an Office of General Counsel, the SIO is often responsible for advancing the development of partnerships and the written agreements and contracts that guide them (Hoseth, 2016). Institutions are also expected to monitor the outcomes of these partnerships, ideally advancing strategic partnerships that generate intended outcomes (Ruwanpura et al., 2020). As global engagement efforts have proliferated in recent years, the role of the SIO in advancing and shaping international partnerships has emerged as a critical responsibility of the SIO position (Gatewood, 2020a).

Curriculum and Cocurriculum

Given the primacy of learning as a central tenet of higher education, SIO often claims some measure of responsibility for assuring that global learning outcomes or international themes are present within an institution's curriculum and cocurriculum (Brewer & Leask, 2012;

Fragouli, 2020; Leask, 2015; Leask & Charles, 2018). Leask (2015) defined the internationalization of the curriculum as follows:

The process of incorporating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study. (p. 9)

In advancing the internationalization of the curriculum, scholars note that crucial areas of emphasis for the SIO should include a focus on learning outcomes for all students and not those in specific fields of study, approach curricular efforts holistically, and engage actively in assessment (Askildson, 2019; Beelen & Jones, 2015; Brewer et al., 2022; Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012; Fragouli, 2020). Scholars have also noted the importance of cocurricular learning opportunities, such as living-learning communities, speakers and programs, and other informal learning experiences (Antonio & Ofori-Dwumfuo, 2015; Brewer et al., 2022; Crocco & Wakeman, 2014; McClanahan, 2014).

One area that garnered greater attention during the COVID-19 global pandemic was the increased use of virtual and distance technologies to advance global learning when travel was unavailable (Bruhn-Zass, 2022). Virtual exchange, virtual internships, and collaborative online international learning, commonly referred to as COIL, emerged as new areas of opportunity for the SIO to contemplate as part of their portfolio to internationalize an institution (Feldman, 2021; Guimarães & Finardi, 2021; J. Lee et al., 2022; Rubin & Guth, 2022).

Education Abroad

SIOs typically oversee Education Abroad opportunities, one of the legacy activities of the international office (Berquist, 2019; Puntene, 2019). I use the term Education Abroad, instead of the classic term Study Abroad, to reflect the current approach to “include academic experiences abroad that may not require enrollment in a course such as internships, service-learning, or research activities” (Goertler & Schenker, 2021, p. 2). This proliferation of the types

of experiences that students experience abroad is matched by further expansion of locations, lengths of terms, disciplines, and other innovations designed to make going abroad more accessible and attractive for students (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Additionally, the entities managing the experience abroad can include private sector program providers, an overseas institution, or the faculty of the home institution (Berquist, 2019).

Global Operations

Di Maria (2019b) cited many examples of the roles that SIOs sometimes take while managing global operations for an institution. Examples include overseas campuses and sites, risk management, crisis responses, foreign financial matters, and legal compliance. This is a more recent entry into the responsibilities of the SIO, which aligns with recent growth in overseas global operations (Wilkins, 2020). The presence overseas of a dedicated teaching operation takes on several shapes and names, including a gateway (Oates, 2017), microcampus (Ghosh et al., 2021), branch campus (Verbik, 2007), or presence in a dedicated educational hub that houses several institutions (Rottlieb, 2023). International students are attracted to these options as they can receive a degree from a U.S. institution without leaving their family or home country (Punteney, 2019). The administration of these initiatives is often filled with challenges, including questions of whether the academic program is of similar quality to the U.S.-based experience (Punteney, 2019), legal and financial issues (Escriva-Beltran et al., 2019), and the ability to sustain the program through difficult times (Kanwar & Carr, 2020).

SIOs are additionally required to address international operations issues, notably risk management, crisis communication, and on-campus legal and financial concerns (Di Maria, 2019a). SIOs shape the development of risk management plans and committees, evaluating geopolitical circumstances to ensure safety for student and faculty travelers worldwide

(Matherly, 2019). Sometimes, situations require communication with campus or community stakeholders, demanding deft communication in difficult situations (Matherly, 2019). Finally, managing financial and legal arrangements across borders fundamentally differs from domestic arrangements, requiring an understanding of foreign tax law, limitations on the transfer of financial assets, legal presence abroad, and international law (Nicolajevic & Di Maria, 2019). These fiscal and legal issues are not always top of mind to the new SIO joining the role, perhaps expecting to focus on study abroad and the needs of international students, but these aspects of the role are so critical that both NAFSA has centered these global operations as a key area of professional practice for SIOs (NAFSA, 2022).

Intensive English Program

Higher education institutions often seek to enroll international students who, in some cases, require additional English training and support to be successful in a U.S. higher education setting (Liu, 2019). The Intensive English Program (IEP) can suffer in an institutional context with inconsistency on where the program is organizationally situated across higher education institutions (Thompson, 2013), and the academic status of the IEP relative to the rest of the institution can be murky (Carkin, 1988). As the primary function of an IEP is often designed to support the success of international students, SIOs sometimes claim oversight of the IEP academic program as part of the more significant international division (Di Maria, 2017).

Like the rest of internationalization, IEPs have also evolved and expanded their offerings to new populations beyond the future international student. Short-term programs are commonplace (Roy et al., 2022), with IEPs in short-term language instruction for specific populations, such as summer immersion programs for high school students from another country. IEPs might offer additional programs, called English for Specific Purposes (Brinton, 2012),

including language instruction in the local community, to a local workforce, or even to employees of the institution themselves. Each program requires that the SIO guide budget management, faculty and instructional support, curricular oversight, and overall program oversight (Liu, 2019).

International Enrollment Management

This dissertation frequently references the rising expectations of SIOs to generate revenue for their institution (Cantwell, 2015; Choudaha, 2017b). The specific activity where this responsibility is most acute is around international enrollment management. SIOs are increasingly expected to increase the number of international students who enroll at their institution and the overall tuition impact from the increased enrollment (Charles & Pynes, 2018; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Kauppinen, 2012).

This is a complex responsibility that demands an in-depth understanding of developing a recruitment plan (Kacenga, 2019; Sinclair & Croom, 2017), recruiting tactics (Di Maria, 2021; Puntene, 2019; Wood et al., 2022), admissions policies (Di Maria, 2017), working with agents (Scoby, 2017), joint and dual degrees (Chan, 2021; Knight & Lee, 2012; LaFleur, 2018; Obst & Kuder, 2009), and effectively managing all fiscal considerations (Choudaha, 2017a; Di Maria, 2021).

International Research and Scholarship

As noted earlier, faculty are interested in working internationally (Whitsed et al., 2022). Specifically, SIOs are often expected to support the faculty's globally centered research (Caruson & Brindley, 2019; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Reisberg, 2020; Walker, 2019). Generally, supporting international research comes with two responsibilities: supporting research development and compliance. Regarding research development, the SIO can foster an

environment that enables faculty to be successful in international research. Specific activities include building institutional capacity and support systems, equipping a campus community to engage in international research, developing fiscal incentive programs such as seed funding or travel funding, and creating partnership pathways that allow research opportunities to emerge (Holbrook & Caruson, 2017; Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018).

However, the SIO also has a role in monitoring compliance and risk in areas of international research. This is especially true in China (Johnston, 2019). In recent years, the U.S. Government has increasingly monitored faculty engaged in research that may have export controls attached to them (Rege, 2006; Rowold & Ponting, 2015). Specific research activities, especially those with any military application, are considered sensitive, export controlled, and unavailable to certain international partners. The rules are strict, and faculty accidentally become noncompliant and may get into significant trouble without even realizing it (Wiggenhorn et al., 2014). In partnership with the research office, the SIO can share responsibilities to advance research opportunities and monitor research compliance globally.

International Student and Scholar Services

Once the international student arrives on campus, the International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) team exists to serve their needs throughout their campus experience. The ISSS team, along with the EA, is one of the two legacy activities of the field of internationalization. The arrival of international students to the United States has been a phenomenon dating back to colonial times (Housley, 2019). However, the role of the U.S. government in monitoring the presence of international students shifted dramatically after the events of 9/11. Housley (2019) wrote:

Following September 11, 2001, federal immigration regulations became much more complex and demanding with the government's creation of the Student and Exchange

Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The immigration landscape is constantly changing, whether from a new federal policy, procedure, or interpretation. . . . As a result, compliance is a critical institutional responsibility that demands vigilance and the investment of human, fiscal, and technological resources. (p. 133)

The SIO is responsible for ensuring these regulatory requirements are satisfied.

Additionally, the SIO and ISSS staff colleagues work to ensure that international students and visiting scholars are fully supported during their stay or studies at the institution (Briggs & Ammigan, 2019). These activities can include pre-arrival support meetings, orientation, a full range of programming, and community connections (Gautam et al., 2016; Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Rivas et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2015).

Other Duties

The role of the SIO continues to evolve and expand. In Table 1, Di Maria references additional possible responsibilities, including continuing education programs, Confucius Institutes, online education, and research centers and institutes. These are examples of the types of activities that can emerge in the field of internationalization, and the SIO is often the higher education professional tasked with advancing the opportunity or new idea with global impact (Nolan, 2015; Rumbley et al., 2022).

Internationalization in a Complex World

The role of the SIO is complex; however, the SIO's work is even more challenging as it is firmly situated within a complicated global environment. Some authors and scholars believe we may be at an inflection point in the internationalization of higher education, anticipating global factors such as the coronavirus pandemic, increased nationalism, and increased geopolitical conflict are reshaping the landscape in which internationalization takes place (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Mitchell, 2020). Rumbley (2022) added, "The coronavirus pandemic, nationalism, and international tensions are potential setbacks. The challenges ahead are

significant” (p. 55). This section introduces literature on some of these global challenges that can impact internationalization, as well as literature on a path forward for leaders of internationalization.

Rising Nationalism

Considering nationalism first, authors (Bieber, 2018; Brøgger, 2021) note the prevalence of nationalist tendencies from electorates and political leaders. Bieber (2018) defined nationalism as:

a malleable and narrow ideology, which values membership in a nation greater than other groups (i.e., based on gender, parties, or socio-economic group), seeks distinction from other nations, and strives to preserve the nation and give preference to political representation by the nation for the nation. (p. 520)

In short, nationalism preferences local concerns over the ideals and opportunities of globalization. Authors cite President Trump’s popularity in the United States, Brexit, and electoral victories in Brazil, Southeast Asia, and throughout Europe as markers of a worldwide trend leading to a deglobalization of society (Bremmer, 2018). Arguments are made that the global pandemic accelerated nationalism and deglobalization (Irwin, 2020; Su & Shen, 2021). Bieber (2018) presented a more nuanced view, suggesting no universal global trend toward nationalism but an increased prevalence based on local choices and trends. Whether nationalist trends are global or regional, an increase in nationalism inhibits the ability of higher education institutions to engage globally (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Brøgger, 2021; Ross, 2022).

Turning to recent history, the Muslim travel ban policies enacted during the first Trump Administration offer a salient example of the potential impact that nationalist political movements and action can impose on the internationalization of higher education (Todoran & Peterson, 2020; Van De Walker & Slate, 2019). On January 27, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order banning travel to the United States for 90 days from seven predominantly

Muslim countries—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. This action generated several legal challenges and subsequent reissuing of new executive orders, all designed to prohibit travel and refugee resettlement from predominantly Muslim countries. The Supreme Court ultimately upheld most provisions of a third and final version of the ban by a 5–4 ruling (Totenberg & Montanaro, 2018), which President Biden revoked during his Administration.

The impact on higher education in the aftermath of Trump’s Executive Orders was significant. Overall, international student enrollment fell by 6% at U.S. universities in the following academic year (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018; Martel et al., 2020), a sharp decline from the prior years. Hacker and Bellmore (2020) wrote that anti-immigration rhetoric, personal safety threats, legal stress, and shifting requirements for both students and colleges led to a “Trump Effect,” with negative impacts on international travel, the number of visitor scholars, tuition dollars from enrollment declines, and an overall reduction in diverse populations on campuses. One quantitative study (Song & Li, 2022) found about 12% fewer international students came to the United States during the first 3 years of the Trump presidency, with the chilling effect focused on 26 countries. At the same time, the call to action for international education leaders and staff professionals to support international students was clear (Laws & Ammigan, 2020), leading to the national “You Are Welcome Here” campaign initiated by Temple University (Redden, 2017) in 2017.

International students in the United States felt the negative impact at the time. Todoran and Peterson (2020) qualitatively studied international students at a Midwestern university. Researchers met with 19 doctoral students from 11 countries in four focus groups, asking the following research question: How do international doctoral students make sense of the U.S. political climate based on their lived experiences? The findings of the study revealed elevated

anxiety related to themes of insecurity and stress, travel uncertainty, job prospects, and hostile climate. Overall, participants expressed confusion and a lack of confidence in U.S. policy regarding their ability to stay in the country and their ability to have access to postgraduate employment through OPT or H-visa arrangements, and participants were unsure if new countries might get added to the list. The participants noted an appreciation for the extra work of university staff in difficult times and appreciated the empathy that staff professionals exhibited toward the international students.

According to news reports (Samuels, 2023), as a candidate “Trump said he would bring back the travel ban and ‘expand it even further to keep Radical Islamic Terrorists out of our country,’ according to prepared remarks.” The data collection for this study occurred prior to the 2024 election of Donald Trump. However, as I complete this dissertation in 2025, President Trump has already initiated a new travel ban (Seminera, 2025), put a pause on student visa review (Babankov, 2025), and threatened long-standing policy that threaten traditional support for international students and international workers (Alvarez & Iyer, 2025; M. Cruz, 2025) . In Chapter 5, I share reflections on real-time intersections and reflections between the findings of this dissertation and the 1st year of the second Trump Administration.

Geopolitical Conflict and Violence

In addition to nationalism, rising international tensions are also a growing concern. One visible and violent example is the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its aftermath. The conflict has impacted higher education in Ukraine (Temnycky, 2022) and Russia (Havergal, 2022; Lem, 2022). The future impacts of the ongoing conflict are uncertain. The tragedy of the Gaza Strip in 2023 is leading some local political officials to ban Palestinian student organizations (Borter, 2023), and there is a growing movement to revoke visas of individuals

connected to extremism in the region (Lewis & Psaledakis, 2023). The events in Ukraine and Gaza provide complicated examples of the issues that emerge for SIOs, which can constrict their ability to enact an internationalization agenda.

Political tensions are also increasing between the United States and China, with several impacts on higher education. Scholars note a significant decline in enrollment of Chinese students at U.S. institutions of higher education (Martel, 2020; Martel & Baer, 2021; Mok et al., 2021). The Chinese government enforced restrictive travel and quarantining policies to minimize the virus's spread (Yang, 2020). Political choices in the United States also impact the United States–China relationship. The Trump Administration era “China Initiative” brought increased scrutiny and the threat of legal action against those engaged in research partnerships with Chinese institutions (Thorp, 2022). The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act also threatened to discontinue significant government research grants for U.S. institutions hosting Chinese government-sponsored Confucius Institutes (National Defense Authorization Act, 2019), leading to the wholesale closure of most Confucius Institute centers across the United States (NAS, 2022). The China Initiative and Confucius Institute closures were explicitly targeted at higher education institutions based on government concerns of espionage from China.

The rise in nationalism worldwide, increases in geopolitical tension, and presence of violent global conflict impact the ability of SIOs to shape and implement internationalization strategies. In recent years, another disruptive global event in this field was the arrival of the coronavirus global pandemic, bringing the internationalization of higher education to a standstill (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Martel, 2020; Soler et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 Global Pandemic

The internationalization of higher education has changed over time, marked by tremendous growth in student mobility, faculty engagement, and institutional initiative. This growth stopped with the COVID-19 global pandemic. The COVID-19 virus was first detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 (Ryan, 2021), spreading worldwide and becoming prevalent in the United States in March 2020. In the Spring of 2020, closures and cancellations quickly cascaded, including border closings, airline flight restrictions, and public health restrictions. International travel became virtually impossible, leading to the rapid evaporation of traditional internationalization activities. Practitioners and scholars alike started to write that the disruption to internationalization during COVID would likely lead to a permanent evolution of the field as we enter a new post-COVID era. Table 2 presents a series of perspectives on the disruptive nature of the global pandemic on the internationalization of higher education.

Table 2*Select Comments on Change in Higher Education Internationalization*

Comment	Context	Source
Confronting the seismic impact of COVID-19: The need for research	Prominent higher education journalist	(Fischer, 2020, p. i)
The field has gone through so much. We have changed; organisations and associations have changed; the world has changed. But for us, this is really a time of renewal.	CEO and Executive Director of NAFSA, the leading professional association in the field	(Manning, 2023, para. 24)
80% of respondents somewhat agree or strongly agree that COVID-19 will impact the long-term internationalization strategy of their campus	American Council on Education major study on the state of international education in the United States.	(Soler et al., 2022, p. 32)
The impacts on mobility (students and faculty), campus internationalization, and cross-border research and collaborations have been massively disruptive. “How long will this last” is not the right question. The better question is, “How will internationalization adapt to help shape a new normal.”	Former president of NAFSA and noted scholar	(Hudzik, 2020, p. 1)
Internationalization is a process in constant evolution, which changes in response to local, national, regional, and global environments. Current global trends appear to be more radical than in the past and require stronger attention and international cooperation than ever; nationalist–populist movements, the need for climate change, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are particularly vital.	Prominent scholars on internationalization in higher education	(de Wit & Altbach, 2020, p. 17)

Jacobs and Mitchell (2021) studied articles published in *University World News* in 2020.

They analyzed 172 articles, synthesizing themes including internationalization of higher education, pandemic, and the common good. Regarding internationalization, they found:

There seems to be a conviction by most authors that HE [higher education] has irrevocably changed. While some are convinced that the pandemic opened up opportunities and will change the HE landscape for the better, others have a more gloomy outlook. Still, a few authors believe we will eventually return to the prepandemic status quo. (p. 27)

The study's authors noted a dominant discourse on the internationalization of higher education, focusing on the neoliberal obsession with funding, rankings, and global competitiveness (Jacobs & Mitchell, 2021), and the data emphasized these concerns. That view was shared by Liu and Gao (2022), who interviewed 20 leading internationalization scholars worldwide on the challenges and future anticipations of internationalization in the wake of COVID-19. Data were collected in late 2020, in the middle of the pandemic. The scholars found participants viewed internationalization in pre-COVID time as needing to improve, including the mobility-dominant and commercially driven approach, such as the need for more attention to social and cultural responsibilities. Such weaknesses became more alarming during COVID. The authors call for acquiring updated knowledge of higher education internationalization in changing times.

Goodman and Martel (2022b) struck a more optimistic tone on internationalization after the COVID-19 global pandemic, stating, "The future of international education and academic exchange is bright" (p. 7). They highlight several points to support their perspective, including a post-COVID rebound in international student mobility (Soler et al., 2022), an expansion of higher education opportunities that did not exist decades ago, and a lesson learned from the pandemic that local issues and needs are inherently global, demanding an approach to higher education that incorporates a globally engaged element.

Scholars have used a critical lens to interrogate inequalities exacerbated during the pandemic (Taşçı, 2021), referencing unequal access to distance learning technology and reliable internet in low socioeconomic status countries, which was necessary as the world pivoted to remote learning. Suspitsyna (2021) further argued:

With its colonial entanglements in the past and neocolonial impulses in the present, the internationalization of higher education in the U.S. requires a critical lens through which the centrality of Whiteness in international education and knowledge production can be documented, analyzed, and dismantled. (p. 57)

This collection of literature calls for further exploration of the rationales of internationalization, arguing the COVID-inspired pause on travel-centric and revenue-oriented internationalization be reimagined with peace and social justice in mind.

Looking Ahead

Looking into the future, in the wake of this complex global environment, Hunter et al. (2022) made the compelling argument that internationalization activities have become the purview of the international office, terming this phenomenon of internationalism as a distinct and separate activity from *exceptionalism*. In a post-COVID environment, they contend that internationalization should be embraced and embedded across an institution. They introduced the MARS model, which calls for institutions to focus on Mission, Academics, Resources, and Support activities (Hunter et al., 2022, p. 317). Their contribution to literature continues with a single case study on applying the MARS model in higher education internationalization at an institution in Chile. The authors found, in this case, individuals across the institution were willing to embrace international efforts when there was a clear connection to the stated broader institutional goals. My research study, exploring internationalization strategy in the face of competing institutional priorities, overlaps with this case study on the role of international office staff professionals in the post-COVID era.

A second foundational article from this collection of literature was authored by de Wit and Altbach (2020). They view internationalization priorities as centered on student mobility, faculty mobility, massification, revenue increases, rankings and prestige, the internationalization of research, and operating in a context that is reactive to national and institutional strategies. They call for a different set of priorities for internationalization that instead prioritize student learning outcomes, virtual exchange less reliant on travel, the UN Sustainable Development

Goals, ethical concerns over revenue motivations, diversifying participation for disadvantaged groups, and a more comprehensive approach to internationalization. They conclude by stating:

The current crises in the world and higher education (COVID-19, racism, climate change, recession, and geopolitical tensions) will, on the one hand, make it more difficult to prioritize these recommendations, but they can also be seen as opportunities or even necessities for the future of higher education and its internationalization. (de Wit & Altbach, 2020, p. 17)

Their observations serve as a call to action for SIOs and higher education leaders to intentionally advance higher education internationalization to improve the state of the world, instead of focusing on individual or campus stakeholders as the product of global engagement.

Chapter Summary

This literature review supports my dissertation on the internationalization of higher education. The chapter provided a scholarly introduction to five key areas, namely the theoretical frameworks for this dissertation, the historical context of internationalization, several definitions and rationales for internationalization, the broad array of responsibilities that fall to the SIOs, and the complex global environment in which higher education internationalization is situated.

A key takeaway from this body of literature is that internationalization has been a fluid and evolving phenomenon, touching virtually every aspect of the institution. This context presents significant opportunities and pressures the SIO to balance multiple options and stakeholder preferences when formulating and implementing an internationalization strategy. These challenges are exacerbated by a complex global environment in which internationalization activities occur. This literature provides a critical scholarly context for my study on how SIOs implement internationalization strategies with competing internal and institutional priorities and external challenges that make internationalization difficult.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used for this dissertation on formulating and implementing strategic internationalization priorities at land-grant higher education institutions. In this chapter, I reintroduce the research questions for this study. I then provide a scholarly overview of qualitative research design and the rationale for this approach in this dissertation. I continue by introducing specific methodological elements of my study, including the use of a constructivist paradigm, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

Internationalizing higher education institutions in the United States is complex and critical, particularly for senior international officers (SIOs) at land-grant institutions. SIOs are charged with guiding a multifaceted agenda that includes increasing study abroad participation, recruiting international students to their institutions, supporting international students and scholars after their arrival to campus, maintaining rigorous international visitor compliance expectations of the U.S. government, enhancing educational outcomes for all students, advancing global partnerships, and supporting the international interests of faculty (Deardorff et al., 2022; Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Di Maria, 2019b; Merkx & Nolan, 2015; Puntaney, 2019). The role of the SIO is complicated by rising expectations to generate revenue from internationalization efforts, along with balancing varying expectations of numerous stakeholders, such as university presidents, administrators, faculty, and students (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014; Choudaha, 2017b; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Merkx & Nolan, 2018; Soler et al., 2022; Zhou, 2016). Externally, the rise of geopolitical conflict, shifting economic realities

internationally, and unexpected calamities like the COVID-19 global pandemic significantly affect the internationalization of higher education institutions (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Schoorman, 2000; van der Wende & Kalvemark, 1997; Zhou, 2016). A pivotal question arises within this challenging landscape marked by significant internal and external pressures: How do SIOs effectively develop and implement internationalization strategies? The research questions for this study were:

1. How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?
2. How do external forces, such as geopolitical conflict and global pandemics, influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies?

Methodology of the Study

I used a basic qualitative research methodology for this dissertation study. This methodology allowed for a rich exploration of higher education internationalization. The following section introduces this methodology and details how I applied it in my study.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted four characteristics that are key to understanding the general nature of qualitative research. First, qualitative research focuses on meaning and understanding. They wrote, “The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process . . . of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). The authors contend a fundamental goal of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon of interest from the participant’s perspective. Second, they noted the human

researcher is the primary instrument for data collection, often through interviews, observation, and document collection. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further stated the researcher is responsible for interpreting the data, which inherently occurs through the researcher's lens. This approach invites bias from the researcher throughout the study, perhaps to a detrimental effect. However, centering the primacy of the researcher also allows for significant flexibility and a more nuanced assessment of the qualitative data. Third, qualitative research is inductive, with findings derived from qualitative data, and outcomes emerge from the data to create categories, typologies, concepts, or theories. Finally, the product of qualitative research is typically presented with a detailed description, conveying an in-depth account of the data and using text and images instead of statistics alone to report the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research does not require the researcher to use specific data collection methods (Merriam, 1988). However, typical data sources include documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Qualitative research methods allow for adapting to emerging themes and issues during data collection (Patton, 2015). Because SIOs operate in dynamic and often unpredictable environments, this flexibility was invaluable in capturing real-time perspectives and strategies. Although their definition is arguably oversimplistic, Braun and Clarke (2013) wrote, "The most basic definition of qualitative research is that it uses words as data . . . collected and analyzed in all sorts of ways. Quantitative research, in contrast, uses numbers as data and analyzes them using statistical techniques" (pp. 3-4).

Constructivist Paradigm

The philosophical underpinning of this dissertation was rooted in the constructivist paradigm. In constructivist research, knowledge is not viewed as a fixed entity that can be

discovered; instead, knowledge is viewed as being coconstructed between individuals in a social context (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2013). A constructivist approach allowed for a nuanced exploration of how participant SIOs at land-grant institutions formulate and implement internationalization strategies within complex contexts. Each SIO's approach to developing an internationalization strategy was shaped by unique institutional goals, the SIO's interactions with other administrators, faculty, students, and external partners, and the dynamic and evolving geopolitical realities in which their higher education institutions are situated (Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Di Maria, 2019b; Merx & Nolan, 2015). By adopting a constructivist paradigm, this dissertation provides an authentic and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and complexities facing participant SIOs as they navigated the internationalization landscape at their land-grant institutions.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling for participant selection. Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom technique that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that make them particularly well-suited to provide insights relevant to the research question (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015). As the research questions focus on SIOs at land-grant institutions, I selected 15 individuals who, at the time of data collection during Summer 2024, were working as or had recently worked as the SIO at a U.S.-based land-grant institution.

Each institution typically has one individual serving in the senior-most SIO role, leading campus-wide internationalization. However, specific job titles for SIOs are inconsistent across higher education (Kwai, 2017). The specific titles of the participants varied, and for the purpose of protecting anonymity of the participants, I am not identifying specific titles in this document. However, professional titles in higher education often have two parts. They include the

classification followed by the area of oversight. For example, my current professional title is assistant vice provost (i.e., classification) for international affairs (i.e., oversight). The titles for the study's participants followed a similar pattern. Their titles included or resembled vice provost/president/chancellor, associate provost/president/chancellor, associate vice provost/president/chancellor, assistant vice provost/president/chancellor, dean, or executive director (Kwai, 2017). The inconsistencies in professional titles are also found in the naming of the areas of oversight. However, the participants oversaw areas that included or resembled global/international engagement, global/international affairs, global/international programs, global/international education, and other variations on this theme.

I selected individuals who had worked in their SIO positions for at least 2 years. This enabled participants to have sufficient time to understand institutional priorities, develop their own internationalization priorities, establish connections across the campus, and understand the institution's fiscal circumstances. A 2-year minimum in their role allowed for a substantive base level of experience to adequately address the research questions.

I selected SIOs working at institutions in different geographic contexts across the United States. Identifying 15 participants allowed for a variety of institutional contexts, creating robust opportunities to compare experiences and reflections. I reinforced opportunities for comparative analysis by selecting participants from all four time zones across the mainland United States.

I did not set other specific limits or expectations for participants. For example, to serve as a participant, I did not set an expectation for an SIO reporting arrangement, although they typically report to an institution's provost or president (Kwai, 2017). I did not set expectations for specific areas of oversight, which encompassed the wide array of possibilities introduced in Chapter 2.

The participants were all SIOs from land-grant institutions. I made an intentional choice that all participants worked at the same classification of schools. Different institution types can approach internationalization differently. For example, some institution types focus more on faculty research, whereas others prioritize the student learning experience (Copeland et al., 2017; Helms et al., 2017; Soler et al., 2022). I preferred to minimize systemic differences in strategic internationalization priorities among the participants where possible. I instead selected SIO participants from a shared institution type to create rich opportunities for comparisons across the participants, specifically, institutions that identify as land-grant institutions in the United States as of 1862 (NIFA, n.d.).

Participant Recruitment Plan

I used purposeful sampling to begin with the list of 1862 land-grant institutions in the United States (see Appendix A). Using publicly available online institutional directory information, I identified the SIO, the leader of each international office currently working at the 1862 land-grant institutions. I created a list of these individuals, including their names, titles, and email addresses. I did not include a school in the outreach when I could not easily identify the SIO using public sources. If there was a situation where the SIO was listed as the interim or acting leader, I did not reach out to those individuals.

Next, using publicly available directory and biographical information, I identified 40 individuals who met my criteria of:

- SIO of a land-grant institution
- Minimum of 2 years in their SIO role
- Represent various geographic regions of the United States

I did not consider the SIOs currently at Colorado State University and the University of Arizona for conflict-of-interest reasons.

I sent an email to 15 individuals who met these criteria, inviting them to consider serving as a participant in my study. In some cases where I did not receive a response, I identified and reached out to others who met my criteria. The email introduced the purpose of the study, the time commitment, an overview of the study, and other relevant information. Please refer to Appendix B for this introductory and invitation email. Fortunately, after some ongoing email follow-up, I received positive responses from 15 individuals and moved forward with that group serving as the participants. The participants were not compensated for their participation in this study.

Collecting Consent to Participate in Research

I provided each participant with an Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved Consent to Participate in Research Form. I drafted the form using templates provided by the Colorado State University Institutional Research Board team (see Appendix C). The form featured multiple sections, including introduction, procedures, benefits, risks/discomforts, confidentiality, compensation, and rights. It concluded with a signature and date section. I received completed forms from each participant via email.

Confidentiality is a particular area of attention throughout this study. Because the community of SIOs at land-grant institutions is a small group, there is some likelihood that participants may be familiar with each other. To mitigate concerns of breaching confidentiality, I developed and used pseudonyms throughout the study. I aligned the pseudonyms with the names of actual international cities, a fun invention for a study on global engagement. The pseudonyms

for the 15 participants in my study are Bamako, Florence, Jai, Jericho, Kingston, Kobe, Lucia, Medina, Paris, Salvador, Santiago, Sofia, Sydney, Vienna, and Zaria.

Data Collection

I then turned to data collection. This study's primary data collection method featured one 90-minute semistructured interview with each participant. Understanding the busy schedules of SIOs, in consultation with my advisor and committee, I decided this was the most effective approach to connecting with this specific group of participants. The dissertation relied on semistructured interviews as the primary tool for data collection. Semistructured interviews are an appropriate data collection method as they yield rich, qualitative data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A semistructured interview approach also allows for deviation and exploration of topics and information as the discussion with participants unfolds (Patton, 2015).

As a qualitative research study, I wanted to ensure that the overall contours of the questions had general consistency from interview to interview, enhancing data analysis across participants. Semistructured interviews provided a balance of consistency and flexibility to generate in-depth data on the research question (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Questions were designed using the theoretical frameworks of the internationalization cycle (Knight, 1994) and academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Please refer to Appendix D for the Interview Protocol, which includes the semistructured interview questions and discussion topics for the interviews. Following is a collection of sample topics used for the semistructured interviews:

1. What are your areas of responsibility?
2. What is going particularly well for you and your team right now?
3. What are your office's or team's goals and intended outcomes for the next 2–3 years?

4. Which other individuals or units are deeply involved in international work at your campus? What are their goals?
5. To what extent are you expected or required to generate revenue to support the institution? Can you share examples?

As noted earlier, this study involved 15 participants. The two research questions for this dissertation were wide ranging, and I required ample time with each participant to explore them in depth. However, these professionals were extremely busy. To address both issues, I scheduled one 90-minute semistructured interview with each participant to allow enough time to address each topic sufficiently. During the first portion of each interview, the discussion started with introductory information, individual SIO responsibilities, and personal preferences regarding internationalization. We then turned to navigating internal pressures, competing priorities from campus stakeholders, and expectations to generate revenue. Finally, we discussed navigating external factors such as geopolitical conflict and pressures from the state for federal government. I concluded with three common questions asking participants: (a) What is their biggest challenge as SIO? (b) What advice would they give to a new SIO?, and (c) What gives them optimism for the future?

I conducted all semistructured interviews over Zoom, a standard meeting platform that became commonplace during the COVID era. Using Zoom eliminated travel time and financial investment to visit each location for interview sessions. The consent form collected from participants alerted participants that I recorded interviews using embedded Zoom functionalities. I created a secondary audio recording using an additional recording device. I stored the interviews' audio and video files in a password-protected One Drive cloud-based account and abided by all IRB-recommended policies regarding data management. Upon completion, I transcribed each interview with initial support from Rev, an online fee-based service that

transcribes audio recordings. Starting with this initial draft, I edited each document to create the final transcript.

Data Analysis

Given the exploratory and complex nature of the research question, thematic analysis was employed as the primary data analysis technique for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Thematic analysis offers the flexibility to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the data (Saldaña, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2022) presented a six-phase approach to thematic analysis, which was followed in this dissertation. Their six phases of thematic analysis include (1) data set familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) initial theme generation, (4) theme development and review, (5) theme refining, defining, and naming, and (6) write-up.

For Phase 1, data familiarization, I transcribed the interviews as described earlier. I reviewed transcripts several times for accuracy. I read each transcript, highlighted participant excerpts, and assigned them to relevant codes and sub-codes. I identified initial codes, such as SIO Responsibilities and SIO Priorities, which served as the basis for later analysis. As an iterative process, early interviews helped me improve my time management and the questions I asked in later interviews. I reviewed all participant transcripts multiple times. All participants are referenced with quoted excerpts in the chapter on the study's findings. My Dedoose records show I captured 1,619 excerpts. Jericho, Vienna, and Kobe have the most excerpts. I did not use AI-enabled tools for coding tasks in this study.

For Phases 2 and 3, Saldaña (2021) outlined techniques for developing codes and themes, including *eclectic coding*, an appropriate approach to coding qualitative data for less experienced qualitative researchers. Eclectic coding allows multiple coding techniques to co-occur, offering

“an initial, exploratory technique with qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 223) for studies with extensive and varied datasets.

I created 140 distinct codes and sub-codes. I used Dedoose, an online qualitative research tool, to highlight excerpts directly in each transcript and assign each excerpt to at least one code. I ultimately created 27 primary codes, for example, Campus Allies, Campus Priorities, Ecosystem – State and Local, and Planning. I also created a broad primary code, Amazing Quotes, for excerpts that were particularly illustrative, powerful, or compelling. I asked all participants three common questions to conclude each semistructured interview and designed primary codes to capture responses to each question.

The process of code development and excerpt assignment was iterative and improved over time. I used memos, reflective writing, and word maps throughout this process to help organize my thoughts on how to manage the data. For example, memos helped me reframe how I coded excerpts on campus challenges. I was initially interested in the titles of the individuals who created campus challenges, aiming to discern systemic patterns based on organizational charts. As participants shared a wide array of examples from their contexts, with either the provost, president, deans, vice presidents, or faculty causing the challenges, I realized that it was more important to capture *what* happened than *who* caused the challenge. I pivoted to developing codes on the specific nature of the challenges, such as disinviting the participant from decision-making spaces or demonstrating apathy towards international activity. This choice illustrates one of several reflections and adjustments I made throughout the data analysis portion of this study.

After sharing initial coding work with my advisor, I also learned that I had started with too many primary codes and that my code titles and data-organizing approach were too granular. After that realization, I broadened the primary code titles and used sub-codes more effectively.

Primary codes typically had between three and seven sub-codes underneath them. In rare cases, I added a third layer of subcodes beneath a subcode. To illustrate one example of my improved approach, here is the final taxonomy for one primary code, International Office Resources. Under that primary code, I had the following seven sub-codes: Base funding, Cuts, Fees, Fundraising, Generating Revenue, Office Funding, and Staffing. Under the Fees sub-code, I used an additional set of sub-codes to highlight pertinent information, namely Education Abroad Fees, Fees to Departments, and International Student Fees. This approach to organizing codes, relying on multiple levels of codes under each primary code, was ultimately effective for this study.

Once I was satisfied with the coding exercise, I moved to Phases 4 and 5, which featured theme development, followed by refinement and naming themes. I was able to search for and review selected excerpts associated with specific primary codes and sub-codes across all the transcripts. This step marked a shift from organizing the data to actively interpreting it. For each primary code, I reviewed all associated excerpts collectively, rather than participant by participant, to identify recurring patterns, shared language, points of convergence, and notable divergences in how participants described similar experiences or perspectives. I took additional notes and memos during this process to document emerging observations and my evolving analytic thinking.

For example, when reviewing all excerpts coded under Planning, I observed clear patterns in how participants discussed planning and priority setting. Many participants expressed skepticism toward formal strategic planning processes, describing planning as disconnected from institutional priorities, motivated by cultural or symbolic expectations, or quickly rendered obsolete by unanticipated disruption. At the same time, a smaller set of excerpts reflected a

contrasting view, with some participants describing strategic planning as valuable, necessary, or helpful to their work.

Through this comparative review process, the Planning code shifted from a descriptive organizing category to a more interpretive analytic tool. Reviewing the excerpts collectively revealed that participants were not describing a shared or consistent commitment to planning as a common guiding practice. Instead, the dominant pattern across the data reflected a more cautious or critical orientation toward planning, shaped by external pressures, shifting institutional priorities, and resource constraints. Patterns were treated as analytically meaningful when similar views or experiences appeared across multiple participants and were discussed with sufficient depth or emphasis to suggest more than an isolated or incidental observation. Identifying this pattern allowed me to move beyond cataloging references under the Planning code and toward naming a broader theme that captured how SIOs navigate strategy in constrained and unpredictable environments.

Finally, I wrote up the findings, Phase 6 of my data analysis approach. Continuing the example in the prior paragraph, following the patterns in the data on planning, I developed the theme *Internationalization Priorities are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches*. I applied this same analytic process across all primary codes, reviewing coded excerpts for commonalities and differences and using those patterns to develop and then write up the themes presented in the Findings Chapter, which represents the final stage of writing.

Saldaña's (2021) approach to thematic analysis, along with Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase data analysis process, was invaluable for handling the large volume of qualitative data, breaking it into excerpts attached to various codes, identifying authentic patterns, and generating meaningful findings. This iterative and reflective data analysis process was well-suited to

constructing a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data, aligned with the constructivist paradigm underpinning this study (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Study Trustworthiness

The study was designed to align with appropriate practices that enhance internal validity practices for qualitative research studies. Internal validity refers to choices made by the researcher so that the identification of data sources and data collection methods are appropriate for the phenomenon studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research design as a qualitative study, with participants representing similar positions employed by similar institution types, provided an embedded opportunity to establish internal credibility of the data by allowing for comparative analysis across participants.

External validity measures, such as transferability, ensure findings can be replicated in other studies or contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2018) stated, by definition, the goal of qualitative research is not necessarily the transferability of the findings. Instead, the goal is to describe the perspectives as presented by the participants. Readers will be left to discern how findings from this study may apply in different contexts, or perhaps even in their specific circumstance. Following Yin's approach, I did not seek to develop generalizable or transferable findings from this study.

I engaged in an external review of my research design and findings to receive outside feedback regarding my study. The primary external voices regarding the research design included my advisor and dissertation committee. My dissertation report includes a clear description of the design and implementation of this study, allowing future researchers to replicate aspects of this study in whatever way they choose.

As a significant component of my final report, I have provided a thick description of the data collected from participants (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative scholars emphasize that studies should not always be used to generalize across broader populations, nor should findings from research studies offer predictions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead, in Chapter 4, the findings chapter, I attempted to provide sufficient information or a thick description that enables the reader to apply the findings in a different context. In reporting the findings, I frequently used quotations from participants, balanced with appropriate summarization, to provide a vivid and in-depth synthesis of the data provided by participants.

Limitations

There are a variety of limitations inherent in the design of this study that need to be acknowledged. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the research delved into an emerging phenomenon, the implications of which might continue to evolve. Consequently, the insights derived from the data are outdated upon the study's completion. The swift arrival of the coronavirus global pandemic serves as one recent example of how scholarship on the internationalization of higher education can change in an instant (Amoah & Mok, 2020; Di Giovine & Bodinger de Uriate, 2021; Fincher, 2021). Data for this study were collected between July and September of 2024, in the months before the election of President Donald Trump. As President Trump's administration is having a disruptive impact on higher education and global engagement, future studies will undoubtedly incorporate the impact of President Trump's second administration in ways that I have not. While recognizing this limitation, the study aimed to capture a snapshot of the phenomenon of campus internationalization, which holds valuable scholarly insights.

By selecting SIOs at land-grant institutions in the United States, I acknowledge I omitted many voices from this dissertation. I have not included the voices of individuals from outside the United States or other types of institutions, such as community colleges, small liberal arts schools, or specialty institutions (e.g., HBCUs). The voices of campus stakeholders outside the SIO (e.g., presidents, staff, faculty, students) are also absent in my dissertation. I invite future scholars to build on my dissertation and ask similar questions in varying settings and with different participant groups.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations ensure the participants' protection and the research's integrity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). First, before conducting any primary research, I received approval from my academic institution's IRB to ensure adherence to ethical guidelines concerning research involving human subjects. The IRB approval process involved thoroughly reviewing the research design, participant consent forms, data storage protocols, and related ethical considerations.

Informed consent is a fundamental aspect of research ethics. All participants in this study were provided with a consent form detailing the purpose of the study, what their participation entails, and any potential risks associated with their participation. Participants were given the right to withdraw their consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Participants' confidentiality is of the utmost importance throughout this research study. As noted earlier, I obtained consent from participants to record interviews using embedded Zoom functionalities. I created a secondary audio recording using an additional recording device. I stored the interviews' audio and video files in a password-protected One Drive cloud-based account.

Information provided during the interview process that could identify the participants or their institution was anonymized in the final report. A pseudonym was assigned to each individual and institution. In a handful of excerpts in Chapter 4, I even chose to omit the pseudonym, as some of the comments shared by participants were highly critical of their leadership or of the politics of their community, making them potentially vulnerable to retribution if they were identified. I have taken every reasonable precaution not to link specific comments to participants. Audio and video files from the interviews have been securely stored. Interview transcripts have been stored in a password-protected format with access limited to the researcher. The data will be used solely for this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework that guided my dissertation. The study used a basic qualitative methodology to delve deeply into the experiences and perspectives of SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions. The study was centered on the constructivist paradigm. Purposeful sampling was employed to select participants, ensuring the study remained contextually relevant and focused. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews. A six-phase approach to thematic analysis was applied for data analysis, starting with transcription to enhance familiarity with the data and then developing and refining codes and themes. Ethical considerations have been rigorously observed, including IRB approval and safeguarding participant confidentiality. Limitations have been acknowledged, including the study's focus on a specific type of higher education institution in the United States and its exclusion of other key stakeholders. Strategies for ensuring validity have elevated the trustworthiness of the dissertation. The methodology offers an appropriate research design to explore how SIOs navigate complex challenges in formulating and implementing internationalization strategies.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This qualitative research study aimed to explore the phenomenon of higher education internationalization, and specifically, how Senior International Officers (SIOs) charged with advancing the internationalization of their campus formulate and implement internationalization strategies while navigating diverse stakeholder interests and priorities at the institutional level while simultaneously reacting to the complex and evolving global context that impacts internationalization activity. The two research questions guiding this qualitative research study were as follows:

- How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?
- How do external forces, such as geopolitical conflict and global pandemics, influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies?

This study was conducted with two theoretical frameworks serving as key lenses. The first theoretical framework for this study was academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), which helps explain how universities succumb to the pressures of neoliberalism and engage in new investment, marketing, and consumption behaviors that link them with the new economy. The second theoretical framework for this study was Knight's internationalization cycle (Knight, 2004). The internationalization cycle is a leadership framework designed to help SIOs develop and implement an internationalization strategy across their institution. The internationalization cycle recommends that SIOs engage in the following six phases as they advance their priorities on campus: awareness, commitment, planning,

operationalize, review, and reinforcement. These phases are fluid and iterative, suggesting SIOs have some authority to proactively develop and advance their own internationalization strategy on a campus.

I conducted 15 semistructured interviews with participants between July and September of 2024, notably before the election of President Trump in November. Each participant served as an SIO at a land-grant institution in the United States for at least 2 years. At the time of the interview, all participants were either currently in their SIO roles or had recently left their positions. I developed and used pseudonyms throughout the study, inspired by names of actual cities around the world. The pseudonyms for the 15 participants in this study are Bamako, Florence, Jai, Jericho, Kingston, Kobe, Lucia, Medina, Paris, Salvador, Santiago, Sofia, Sydney, Vienna, and Zaria. I used an online tool to randomly assign each participant their pseudonym.

The stories and reflections shared by the participants provided a rich data set, offering a candid window into the experience of these land-grant SIOs who are charged with advancing internationalization for their institutions. Participants discussed their responsibilities, priorities, and accomplishments. They also discussed the many challenges they faced at their institution, as well as additional challenges at the state, national, and global levels. We concluded each discussion with recommendations for leading internationalization in the face of these challenges.

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data, regularly returning to this study's research questions and theoretical frameworks. The five predominant themes I identified from the data are as follows.

- The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific
- Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches
- SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization

- SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels
- SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints

This chapter shares detailed findings from the data based on these five themes, relying heavily on anonymized excerpts from the participants. Issues related to revenue, expenses, and other fiscal issues are clear threads throughout the discussions, leading to specific references to academic capitalism across each of the five themes. Similarly, issues related to leadership, as presented in the internationalization cycle, are present throughout the themes.

Altogether, these five themes tell a compelling story about the challenges of leading internationalization efforts at a land-grant institution in the United States. The role and areas of oversight for the SIO are multidimensional and complex, the approaches used to establish internationalization priorities are sometimes surprising, and the challenges SIOs confront both on the campus and from the rest of the world are overwhelming. Yet, despite the barriers and complexities, SIOs are proud of their success in advancing internationalization opportunities on their campuses and were eager to share their recommendations as a part of this study.

The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific

This first theme introduces the diverse mix of formal internationalization responsibilities as described by the participants of this study. At the outset of each interview, I invited participants to describe their areas of responsibility as the SIO at their institution. No two participants shared the exact same areas of oversight. This theme presents findings on the wide-ranging scope of responsibilities in the following three categories: (a) typical SIO responsibilities, (b) subordinate priorities with limited real influence, and (c) responsibilities with revenue-generating dimensions.

Typical SIO Responsibilities

Kobe shared they have general responsibility for all internationalization functions at their institution and then continued by providing more detailed examples of specific functions and teams. They described:

The office that I was head of included various functions. All international and global functions of the university were housed within a centralized office, the [Office of International Programs]. And that office included several smaller teams. Essentially, you could say that anything and everything international or global had to take place or go through the office. And those functions included, number one, admissions and enrollment, where we have a team that works on recruiting international students to the university, assisting them through the admissions process, admitting them at the undergraduate level and working and supporting graduate departments with the admission of international students, and recruitment and admission of international students into doctoral and master's programs at the university. We have a team that only deals with support services and programming of the international student population . . . the team that dealt with the immigration support services, but also the culturalization if you will, or assimilation and cultural learning activities that were available to all international and domestic students. There was a unit that dealt with short-term exchanges. That team worked on study abroad, so several study abroad advisors were working with outgoing domestic students who were enrolling at universities overseas for a short term.

Kobe's response was a valuable starting point on the role of the SIO. The function has been largely viewed as responsible for "anything and everything international" and included supervisory oversight of teams that perform specific services and functions for the institution. However, as participants provided more detailed information on the functional areas, the responses diverged significantly.

All participants shared several common responsibilities. Participants' typical responsibilities included international student and scholar services (ISSS), education abroad, and international partnerships. Jericho started their introduction by commenting on these three areas, saying:

I have the usual. I think I have usual? I have students in and students out. So, education abroad and international student and scholar services. Those are the two biggest teams

that report to me. Then I also have international partnerships and research, which is a team of two. And that also includes our data efforts to produce data visualizations about our global footprint.

Jericho's reference to the student mobility responsibilities as "usual" was echoed in this study's data and the literature presented in Chapter 2.

Santiago described the work of the ISSS team in detail, focusing on the typical responsibilities associated with that group. They commented:

We have services for international students and scholars. These are not only visa programs and keeping people in status and Js and H-1Bs and green cards and so on. But also, we are doing more and more work with international students and scholars to make them feel that they belong, that they are included, that they are visible, acknowledged, and there is a two-way street, and we learn from each other. Programming, coffees, dinners you know, all kinds of things that allow that inclusion element. We also do programming for graduate students and international graduate students because they have particular needs, and they have challenges and so forth. We want to make them successful.

As Santiago introduced, the responsibilities of the ISSS team centered on visa-related services, often for multiple constituencies on the campus, including undergraduate students, graduate students, visiting scholars, and staff and faculty. The responsibilities blended regulatory requirements and information sharing with nonregulatory activities, including orientation for international students and ongoing programming for international students designed to provide support, connection, access to community networks, and fun. Santiago was especially interested in the student success work of their team.

The next typical responsibility among the participants was overseeing education abroad. Santiago again shared a detailed overview of that team's work at their institution, stating:

Then we have a global education unit. That unit works with students . . . where we are aiming for a 100% of our students to have some form of global engagement and global learning opportunity by the time they graduate. So, we obviously offer study abroad programs, but we also offer internships, research opportunities, leadership opportunities, service-learning opportunities. They can be domestic or international, as long as they engage communities representing different cultures, languages, and so on. So

international and intercultural communities that might be in our area, because we assume that not everybody can go abroad. Not everybody can afford to go abroad. Not everybody should go abroad. So how do we walk the talk about accessibility, access, and equity to make sure that everybody can participate? Within that program, we also work with the graduate school offering some programming for graduate students that might be doing field work, that will be going abroad, that might need intercultural awareness before engaging with other cultures. And we also have a living and learning community on the campus that brings together both international and domestic students.

Santiago shared a detailed overview of this team's work, positioning traditional study abroad as one element of a broader strategy that now includes internships, research, and service-learning in international contexts. Local experiences or academic experiences have been part of this broader effort, with a goal of exposing all students at the institution to international themes during their time there.

For Santiago, the goal for the education abroad team was not merely to offer experiences abroad for those with intrinsic interest, but also to create programs with access and equity in mind. This meant developing opportunities that give everyone the opportunity to participate, with cost and timing in mind, along with offering programs for a diverse array of learners. This also meant developing programming that helped students be as successful as possible during these experiences.

Vienna also talked about their broad areas of responsibility, which featured the merging of responsibilities under a new umbrella at the beginning of their time at the institution. Vienna also shared a subtle comment about their oversight of study abroad, which becomes increasingly significant in subsequent themes in this chapter. They explained:

My title, my portfolio was really broad again, because I was the first one. They sort of pulled everything together and said, here, just do this. So, for the system, I was allegedly responsible for all study abroad. All international student recruitment, counseling, advising, immigration, that kind of stuff. I oversaw the faculty research aspect of internationalization. Health, safety, and compliance. I oversaw the internationalizing of the campus and the curriculum. . . . So it was in a weird way, kind of a motley crew. But before they hired me for this job, each of these had basically been disparate units . . . so

they wrapped all this up and said, here, now take this. But of course, they didn't tell any of those units that they were now gonna be under a new person. And they didn't tell the other campuses that there would be a new SIO [laugh; for the system]. So, I came into the job so excited. I go to introduce myself to people, and they're like, and why should I care that you're here? Because you now report to me. Oh!! [laugh].

Vienna shared three revealing anecdotes in these comments. First, the excerpt reinforced the multidimensional responsibilities combined into common teams led by the SIO, and that this combination of activities into one common team is a relatively new structure. Second, Vienna's observation about poor communication signaled some dubious leadership tendencies at their institution, which sometimes was less than ideal. This observation of poor communication and disappointing leadership was referenced by other participants. Finally, the comment that Vienna was "*allegedly* responsible for all of study abroad," an offhand comment, aligned with comments shared by others throughout this chapter on some of the challenges SIOs face on their campus regarding unclear or poorly authorized responsibilities or assigning responsibilities that were ultimately managed in practice from other colleges or units.

A final trend regarding responsibilities that has developed in more recent years was the proliferation of international partnerships. Paris noted this is a new area at their institution, responding:

There is a new piece that I have developed and implemented, which focuses on the research and the partnership development. Going back to when I interviewed for this position, there were parts of my on-campus visit that it was clear to me that the campus was struggling to see beyond a conventional role for an SIO as well as the global office. And what I mean is they were really sort of fixated on the only value that an office like this brings to the campus is around student mobility. So, study abroad programming. And I, in my discussion with the provost as I was finishing up my day of interviews, I bluntly said, if you're looking for someone who can manage your ed broad portfolio, then that's not me. I'm not the right fit. If you're looking for someone who can increase the global footprint of the university and have a positive impact on the knowledge generation that the faculty are working on, then that's something that I am anxious to do.

Developing international partnerships has been an increasingly common approach to advancing international activity. Partnerships with other institutions worldwide have been central to international activities of interest, including inbound and outbound student mobility, faculty research, managing overseas operations, and grant-funded activities, often involving a partner in another location. Specific duties connected to these international partnership management responsibilities included developing formal institutional agreements, hosting international visitors, communicating with international partners, managing data associated with the partnerships, satisfying reporting requirements, and other activities that support international partnership initiatives. Kobe described their partnership efforts, explaining:

We had partnerships. So, oversight of all the partnerships working with the legal counsel office, trying to bring in articulation agreements with foreign institutions, but also managing the relationship building with those institutions so that we can support our efforts in bringing students from those universities, sending our students to those universities, but also supporting faculty on all sort of various short-term or long-term, often externally funded projects. Travel support services for all the faculty that is outgoing for all sorts of academic engagements out there.

Some participants noted the staffing arrangements to support this function in their office was relatively new and typically staffed with one individual or a small team. Still, the number of participants who cited partnership management as a distinct area of responsibility was notable.

Frequently cited areas of responsibility from the participants included ISSS, education abroad, and international partnerships. In the case of ISSS and education abroad, these have been long-standing and traditional responsibilities tied to international education. These responsibilities were so common that institutional colleagues sometimes only saw the role of the SIO through that lens, impeding their ability to engage meaningfully in other activities. However, other emerging responsibilities commonly falling to the participants (e.g., international partnership management) suggest the field's responsibilities were not entirely static.

Subordinate Priorities With Limited Real Influence

This section focuses on internationalization priorities regarding academics and curriculum, faculty research, and supporting activities across a state-wide system. The participants mentioned the responsibilities in this category with less frequency, perhaps driven by their personal interests or by campus circumstances. For example, as noted in the Chapter 2 literature review, internationalization of the curriculum has been an area of emphasis in campus internationalization. Participants also shared they had far less influence over progressing with the specific responsibilities presented in this section, perhaps rendering this collection of activities more aspirational than active.

Beginning with academics, several participants discussed curricular issues and internationalizing students' academic experience as an area of responsibility. Bamako was particularly interested in this and even intended it to be the major area of focus when they were initially hired for the SIO position. They described:

The focus when I joined was on internationalizing the curriculum. [Our university] hadn't yet met [desired academic] benchmarks. You know, we were working towards that. So, there was still more of a priority on campus around undergrad, you know, being one of the top undergraduate institutions in the country. There was still that focus on undergraduate curriculum.

Bamako mentioned internationalization of the curriculum was the specific priority when they initially started in the SIO position. At the time, the goal to internationalize the curriculum aligned with broader institutional goals regarding the undergraduate curriculum. The window of opportunity for Bamako was initially exciting, but fleeting, as circumstances evolved quickly for Bamako. Although the campus made modest progress in incorporating internationalization learning experiences into the general curriculum, institutional goals quickly shifted, and

curriculum internationalization quickly evaporated as a priority. This unexpected shift became a source of frustration for Bamako.

Paris was another participant who oversaw academic initiatives and was proud of the support and resources they could share with other departments through that effort. They shared:

I have a staff member . . . and the primary mission is all the academic programming including education abroad. But we do have a full-time coordinator for international online learning programs [commonly referred to nationally as Collaborative Online International Learning]. The staff member works directly with faculty to do on-campus academic programming, internationalization of the curriculum. We have a pretty big pathway in our core curriculum that is linked to global. The staff member is working with the faculty to expand that and make it a little more robust. Additionally, our student success team is launching this year a new student success program where the foundation of it is high impact practices, so service learning, internships and education abroad is a part of this methodology. We work with the student success team to get those pieces set up and really to try to expand their mindset beyond just education abroad because, you know, I can fundraise all the scholarships in the world. We're still not gonna send all of our students overseas.

Paris was excited about the impact their office had on all students, whether they studied abroad or not. Paris turned to the curriculum as a main vehicle for their international approach, thereby introducing all students to global learning content. Paris's highlight on online international learning mirrored a global trend in coteaching and codelivering a virtual course among partner teachers and student classrooms located in two countries, fostering global engagement without travel. Paris also focused on the core curriculum and highlighted the role of the SIO and the international office as providing resources, tools, and encouragement to the campus.

Returning to Bamako, who noted at the start of this section that curricular internationalization was a priority when hired, this excerpt illustrates the challenges SIOs face when the faculty at their institution are reluctant to participate. I asked how successful the initial efforts were, and Bamako responded:

Nobody wanted to get into the curriculum committee, the subcommittee for curriculum. They didn't want to talk about that. They all wanted to talk about industry, and they

wanted to talk about research, right? Yet our focus was on internationalizing the curriculum. So that was the priority. And what went into the strategic plan was also the curricular side of things, right? Faculty interested in doing international research and building those collaborative networks with the industry and public-private partnerships, all those sorts of things, have always been frustrated that the international office can't help them with that. And I think the ones who are interested in internationalizing the curriculum, just do it in their own classrooms, or they do a study abroad program and that kind of stuff.

Bamako's comment illustrated the challenges inherent in assisting with curricular internationalization. On the one hand, there was latent institutional interest, however, the faculty ultimately had control over their classroom activities and acted based on their own priorities and preferences.

Vienna addressed another priority of interest among some participants. Beyond focusing on academic initiatives, Vienna prioritized support for faculty and other internationalization interests, especially regarding research. They shared:

I really tried, I tried different ways of like, how do you bring more faculty into the discussion? So, it's not just, I, I support faculty research and then the rest of my job is all administrative. I thought about what we could do, and I know other universities try. So could we have, like a once a month, all faculty doing any work in Sub-Saharan Africa, or you could pick two countries. You could pick China. You know, there's a China lunch once a month. People just come and talk about what they do. And we had various, you know, at various times in history or, you know, if we got a big grant that required us to be in different colleges. But I still think that is one of the things that's lacking at the big schools, is getting the thought leaders to think about internationalization that is not study abroad.

Vienna tried to engage faculty, exposing them to networks and opportunities to expand research links worldwide, but the outcome of the effort was often disappointing. As the participants worked at R-1 land-grant institutions, all institutions in this study shared an institutional mission prioritizing faculty participation in research and discovery. In this group of schools, it was common the institution's research portfolio would include internationally located research projects and field stations, funding from international sources, and international partners.

Vienna's comment about advancing internationalization "that is not study abroad" captured the aim of this theme of SIO responsibility as more than merely student mobility. Lucia also prioritized the aspiration of being more than a student mobility office and providing expanded services, especially to faculty. Lucia commented:

I think one ambition that is a constant, that I'm very proud of, is moving the perception of this office on campus from essentially being a transactional student-in, student-out office, to a real thought partner, helping academic units get some of their objectives overseas met. And I should say that I've had a lot of success, but it's mostly with the STEM areas and not so much with the humanities and social sciences, because I think I find that faculty in STEM want to get things done and worry less about how it's being done [laugh], for want of a better word. And faculty in humanities and social sciences would rather spend a lot of time worrying about why something should not be done because it might harm someone, somewhere, instead of actually getting on and doing the thing. So, you know, building our partnership with the research office, launching our international strategic partners program, getting our seed grants launched, building those international research coalitions. Those are all the things that I'm extremely proud of.

Lucia used several key phrases that painted a vivid picture of their perception of the role of SIOs. First, the reference to moving "beyond the perception" of the traditional mobility tasks, also described earlier, was a reoccurring pattern among some participants. By making the comment about being a real "thought partner," Lucia wanted to collaborate with faculty regarding the international expansion of the research enterprise at the campus, especially in ways that help academic units "get some of their objectives met overseas." One important tool to accomplish this goal was "seed grants," a reference to providing resources to help incentivize or enable these activities. Lucia's comment about their perceptions of working with STEM faculty versus humanities or social sciences faculty was also noteworthy, revealing different academic disciplines may have different priorities or take different approaches to internationalization, compelling the SIO to adjust their approach on campus accordingly.

Finally, several participants worked at institutions in a multicampus system within their state. Some participants noted they had responsibilities for supporting the international activities

of other campuses situated elsewhere in their system. However, these responsibilities were described more as consultancy services or problem solvers with limited authority to make substantive changes on different campuses across the state. Lucia described the dynamic of these system-wide responsibilities, saying:

I'm the SIO at my institution. And I also have a concurrent role as the [title] to our system president's office for international. This is for the whole multicampus system. But my primary responsibilities are very much focused on this campus. So, the system role is a bit more, you know, tenuous, lead by example, bring people together to talk about things, sometimes knock heads together, that sort of stuff.

Lucia's comment about system responsibilities being tenuous effectively represented the comments of other participants on this responsibility. In Lucia's case, the system-wide responsibilities were more of a secondary responsibility, providing support or information as needed.

These system-wide responsibilities were explicitly assigned to some participants but with limited authority to influence specific actions. Similarly, leading the curriculum and supporting faculty research have been key functions of higher education central to the mission of land-grant institutions. However, because these activities have been the purview of faculty, and the oversight of these activities has been institutionally structured beyond the scope of the SIO, the ability to shape global activity in this space has also been limited. Although SIOs embraced these opportunities as a part of their portfolio of responsibilities, these activities were challenging to advance in substantial and sustained ways.

Responsibilities With Revenue-Generating Dimensions

This final section of the first finding includes areas of responsibility with clear revenue motivations or opportunities. This section was developed with academic capitalism front of mind, one of the theoretical frameworks for this study. The responsibilities in this section include

activities associated with international student recruiting and admissions, alum outreach and fundraising, and intensive English programs. Notably, participants prioritized the fiscal opportunities and needs of their own international division as they addressed each of these responsibilities, observations that were less present when discussing the first two sections of this theme.

The topic of international student recruiting, admissions, and enrollment was an important area of responsibility that generated a fair amount of attention during the interviews. For most participants in this study, international student recruiting, admissions, and enrollment for undergraduate students were housed in the institution's overall admissions office. In these cases, the SIO and international office teams were eager to partner with the admissions office to attract more international students. Once the students arrived at the campus, the ISSS team of the international division supported them, so there was a clear shared interest between international student admissions and ISSS functions.

Paris described how the vice provost for enrollment claimed oversight of international student recruiting and that this structure was unlikely to change. Paris indicated:

Well, in our case, enrollment is definitely a priority for the provost. And in my case, that's a behemoth impediment because our vice provost for enrollment is the golden child. So, whatever that person says goes.

At Paris's institution, international student recruiting was identified as a clear priority of institutional leadership, however, that responsibility was not assigned to the SIO. Rather, this responsibility was assigned to the enrollment and admissions team on their campus.

Sydney believed structuring international student enrollment outside of the international office was a mistake that many institutions make. I asked Sydney about their responsibilities, and

after sharing an overview of their wide-ranging activities, they concluded with this observation, sharing:

The notable exception, which I think is a mistake in the sector, is international student recruitment, admission and enrollment. That did not report into my office. So, we took the database at the point where the student either paid a deposit after being offered a position at the undergrad level or was offered a position at the grad level. There was no deposit at the grad level. And we would then take that database from the admissions folks and move it through the I-20 process. That, I think, is a major shortcoming in higher ed today in general, 'cause I'm hardly alone. And you may get that theme from some of the other folks you talk to.

In addition to the structural challenges, participants shared different reflections on the perceived importance of international student enrollment growth at their institution. In some cases, such as at Kingston's institution, international student enrollment growth was a clear priority, with pressure and expectations to dramatically increase enrollment and tuition, but with limited resources. Kingston described:

Yeah. I mean, there's a ton of pressure. We have very limited recruiting resources. I also manage recruiting partnerships. So that has been a huge lift for the whole team. I mean, what are the wins? Getting that approved. What is the ongoing challenge? Building it to be successful . . . So I have one person who does the whole world, all the programs, grad and undergrad and all the regions. So, I guess on that front, another thing we do obviously is manage all of our sponsored student relationships and relationships with not only foreign governments, like through their embassy staff, but their scholarship agencies.

For Kingston, international student recruiting was an institutional priority, and they were ultimately responsible for this activity, but with limited resources. Vienna echoed Kingston's observations about the lack of sufficient resources to effectively support international student recruiting at an institution of their size, sharing:

Oh yeah, I have plenty of regrets. I mean I really wish I had gotten more money to hire recruiters to actually engage in meaningful recruitment. You can't have a large university like ours with three, three! <laugh> recruiters and expect to get anywhere. So, it was like, well, what can we show for it? And the provost would say, not much. And I'd say, but if we had two more people . . . and the provost would say, but you're not doing it with three, you know? Not to mention, I've just never worked with a provost who saw them as

anything other than dollar signs, which is why “just get more from China” was so often the answer. So, I regret that I wasn’t able to persuade people to give me a bigger group to do that.

The excerpts in this section from Vienna, Kingston, and Sydney surprised me. Prevailing trends shared at professional conferences for internationalization leaders implied international student enrollment growth was a major priority in higher education and for those leading internationalization efforts. I anticipated some participants would exhibit pressure to produce students and tuition. I was instead surprised to learn from these participants that international student recruiting was not an overwhelmingly significant priority for their institution. Or if it was a priority, those responsibilities were not assigned to the SIO. In the handful of situations where it was assigned, the SIO was not given sufficient resources to be successful. This was a source of pressure and frustration on SIOs.

Jai did not have international recruiting in the portfolio of formal responsibilities; rather, those responsibilities are assigned to the admissions team. However, rather than express frustration, Jai liked it that way. Jai explained:

It works for me. I mean, I wish they would do more, in terms of international recruiting and admissions. They’re not doing much of anything. It’s all word of mouth. The students that are coming here are not recruited by anybody. It is really just word of mouth. But [our institution] is heavily graduate international students. We have a very small percentage of undergraduate students. But the majority are international. And so, it’s just a 100% word of mouth. They find us on their own. We’re not doing anything whatsoever. I wish we did more, but the setup works for me, ‘cause personally, I’m just not interested in overseeing international recruitment and having to worry about numbers. It’s a different ball game.

Another area of current and aspirational responsibility often mentioned by participants was alumni engagement and fundraising. A handful of participants noted they were primarily responsible for receiving at least \$1 million in philanthropic donations to support international

activity at their campus. Santiago was one participant who had experienced success in fundraising but felt they could do even more with more institutional support. Santiago said:

I'm very proud that I raised so much money. But we could raise far more. And a lot of the fundraising is not because development helped me, but because I established an advisory group, and I attracted certain people who are loyal almost personally to me . . . if you don't tell development to pay attention, then the development team doesn't understand and doesn't pay attention. So that's one area that I wish, because I think we have, given who we are and what we do, we could have raised far more money, you know?

In this case, Santiago tried to engage with the advancement division at their institution but was met with resistance and apathy from that team. Despite the lack of institutional support, they identified fund raising for internationalization as a priority and pressed forward to raise funds for global activities.

Florence shared a different example. Although their institution had some history of supporting international fundraising, it was largely unsuccessful. The efforts toward initial outreach to alumni seemed positive, but the fundraising outcomes were not satisfying. Florence indicated:

We have been increasing our engagement with the alumni office and actually trying to establish some nodes of international alumni as well. Not as successfully as some of the other things, but we have made efforts in that area, so it's not out of bounds for us. And finally fundraising . . . that's been kind of a tricky area because, when I started my job several years ago, we had a development officer within international programs. And because the yield from that office, that person was not that great, and could not justify keeping the position. The university, we all together, decided that perhaps we can lump them up with some other offices or colleges covered centrally by the development office, which is where the position has gone to. And I must say, it's not very successful. The outcome has not been that great. But again, I have had conversations with donors myself, but I think not being a college that issues degrees and people feel that connection or affiliation, that makes it harder. And as I said, the alumni part, because we had just started to develop that angle of connections and development possibilities, has been marginally successful, but not as successful as some of the other things that I described.

All participants who talked about fundraising, even those who had been successful, expressed frustration that they were not sufficiently supported by campus fundraising colleagues.

Fundraising has ultimately been the responsibility of an institution's advancement team. This challenge of integrating with the fundraising team resembled challenges shared earlier with integrating with the research team, the academics team, and the admissions and enrollment team.

This section's final area of responsibility was overseeing the intensive English program. Some participants oversaw an intensive English program on their campus, but most did not. Generally, this responsibility was negatively perceived because of the challenging enrollment and fiscal picture for intensive English centers. Jericho talked about considering overseeing this program at a critical time for the center but did not move forward for financial reasons. They explained:

Intensive English does not report to me. There was . . . it's been interesting. For a while I wondered if I should try and bring it into our international center and had some discussions with the previous [Dean of Liberal Arts], 'cause it's primarily now located in that college. That didn't go anywhere when I figured out the financial model wouldn't work for us. So, a new dean came in and didn't want the program. The dean was just gonna close it. That person never even asked. And I was like, whoa, you can't close it. If you're gonna close it, I'll take it. You know, but only to sort of salvage it. And I did all the math. I redid all the financial models. I did everything to see if I could make it work. Then the dean took my work and said . . . oh, no, we'll keep it and we'll run it. Which is fine. I don't really care. You know, if the dean wants it, that's fine. I just want it to be viable, you know. I don't want there not to be one, you know, especially for the poor students who are actually in it, which she had sort of forgotten about. But anyway, so I don't have intensive English, no.

In some settings, the institution never had an on-campus intensive English program. In other settings, the intensive English program closed due to declining enrollment, including during the COVID-19 global pandemic years. Considering declining enrollment and tuition, as Jericho shared, the fiscal circumstances were seen as inherently problematic, leading several participants to stay away from these programs. Intensive English programs have had a history of supporting international students and, as a result, these programs had links to the international

office. However, for most of this group of participants, the intensive English program was not a typical area of oversight, and SIOs expressed limited interest in taking on this responsibility.

This theme outlined several areas of internationalization responsibilities, categorized as (a) typical SIO responsibilities, (b) subordinate priorities with limited real influence, and (c) responsibilities with revenue-generating dimensions. Understanding these responsibilities was a helpful starting point for how SIOs established and implemented internationalization strategies on their campus. Some of the responsibilities discussed in this section were clear, common, and rooted in tradition as an area of SIO oversight. Other responsibilities were more aspirational and present opportunities for global engagement, even though primary oversight for that responsibility was centered elsewhere in the institution. Finally, with academic capitalism in mind, several responsibilities were motivated by the need to generate revenue, especially for the international office.

Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches

The research question in this study asked *how* SIOs formulate internationalization strategies. One of the theoretical frameworks for this study, Knight's internationalization cycle, presents a six-phase process to assist SIOs in leading internationalization on their campus. The third element of the process, *planning*, is cited as an essential tool for being an effective leader. In Chapter 2 of this study, I also discuss literature that highlights planning as a key part of the SIO role (Nolan, 2018).

This second theme addresses multiple approaches to formulating internationalization priorities. The approaches highlighted in this theme include: (a) institutional priorities as the dominant framework for internationalization efforts, (b) assigned goals and imposed

responsibilities, (c) revenue-driven and opportunity-driven priority setting, and (d) divergent perspectives on formal strategic planning.

Institutional Priorities as the Dominant Framework for Internationalization Efforts

Lucia provides a provocative starting point for this discussion on internationalization planning. Rather than introduce their planning process, they shared the institution's priorities are what drive internationalization efforts. They went on to share that individual or distinct plans are flatly unnecessary. After I asked Lucia if they had developed a strategic plan to guide their work, they responded pointedly:

No, because I don't believe in them . . . We have a campus strategic plan. We are a unit in the provost's office. Why should my plan be any different from the campuses' plan? It's my job to link the ideas that I have to things that are in the campus strategic plan. I am a heretic in this respect. I get it. You know . . . but it's like international programs, global programs, we're not an end unto ourselves. We're not a silo. We're not here to do something different from what the university is doing. We're not running our own fiefdoms here. I'm sorry. We're here because there's a university here. We have faculty, we have students. The university has strategies and priorities. The university has outcomes it wishes to get. And it's our job to be, I mean, does student affairs have its own strategic plan? Does the provost's office have a strategic plan? Does the budget office have a strategic plan?

Lucia's attack on conventional wisdom was stunning in comparison to the reflections of other participants. However, in some form or fashion, participants acknowledged institutional leaders set their priorities and SIOs were often reactively seeking ways to calibrate international work with those institutional priorities.

As I listened to Lucia talk about their job at the institution, I understood that Lucia placed high importance on their identity as an employee of their institution who is charged with advancing their employer's priorities. At several points during our discussion, they shared they and the international office they supervise are expected to advance the priorities of the institution. Put another way, the primary goal of the SIO, according to Lucia, is not to advance

internationalization priorities per se, but rather, to advance the mission and priorities of their employer and the institution through internationally oriented opportunities. That simple but profound reflection is heretical when compared to literature and professional practice.

Yet, in their own ways, several participants affirmed this approach of putting the institution first. For Bamako, the institution was motivated to advance the state's strategic priorities, which, in their case, focused heavily on industry partnerships and workforce development. As a result, the institution's president also made industry partnerships and workforce development a priority, which impacted Bamako's leadership choices. Bamako said:

I kind of had to restructure everything. I eventually added an office for, well, I hired someone with a priority on our industry relationships, because of where we're based and because of the land-grant mission. Right? So, given that [our institution] has very strong relationships with the advanced manufacturing industry in our state, I was getting messages and was in conversations. As I learned my role and learned about the institution that, hey, we should be working with all of these German and French and Japanese and Chinese and other industry partners that are here. And I felt that that was a gap in what I had. We added an industry relations position later on.

Referenced in the first finding in this chapter, Bamako was hired initially to advance international opportunities in the curriculum of their institution, an area of professional expertise for Bamako. Working with industry was not an area of personal interest or experience. However, Bamako quickly pivoted to address this institutional and state priority by hiring staff and investing significant personal effort when they realized industry partnerships were a major goal of the institution.

Salvador similarly invested in a new opportunity motivated by the state's economic priorities. In this instance, Salvador invested time in advancing international trade opportunities. Salvador said:

Our state, fortunately, still does see value in international engagement and international trade. They know we're here to support the state, and this is what a land-grant is for, right? You're about supporting the state and the priorities of the state. Well, guess what?

I have staff who can support this work. I can't think of another international office that has that same kind of element.

Salvador highlights a couple topics of special interest. First, Salvador and Bamako each reinforced their institution, like all institutions in this specific study, is a land-grant institution. As defined in the key terms section of Chapter 1 of this dissertation, land-grant institutions were initially established to support the educational and economic interests of the state. The relationship between state government and their land-grant institution is direct, with funding, academic, and policy decisions clearly linking the two entities. This strong relationship between state and land-grant universities is a reoccurring theme throughout this chapter.

Salvador also talked about investing significant time with state-level politicians, joining official trade delegations of the state, and working to position their international office as an advocate for global partnerships that create international trade opportunities. No other participant talked about taking on these types of responsibilities, which were entirely motivated by the priorities of the state where Salvador was located.

Participants also mentioned the institution's fiscal goals were clear institutional priorities. In the case of both Kingston and Sofia, both institutions were looking to generate revenue through increased international student enrollment. Turning to Sofia first, they described a story where they were able to tap into the university's defined needs, which led to resources to support both international student recruiting and study abroad. Sofia shared:

I think for international recruitment, we tapped into a need that the university had. So, if you can find something you wanna do that meets a need, that's really good. Because if you can show how you can meet a need that they have and still advance something that you have in mind, that enhances the opportunity to get recurring funding for it . . . Maybe I was just fortunate? Both the international student recruitment effort and the study abroad effort, I mean, those were millions of dollars, and we just got recurring money for it.

Sofia was fortunate in that institutional priorities aligned with international opportunities, and resources flowed accordingly. Kingston also talked about priorities but without institutional support. Rather, they imagined systemic action to create new academic programs was likely to meet enrollment goals from colleges. Kingston said:

So, I think that what I do on the one hand is explain to our academic units that if they are seeking to grow that professional track masters, especially 1 year or 18-month long professional track masters, you know, are potentially appealing to a prospective international student base. We don't have very many of those. We just have a handful. But, as you know, as the university continues to experience budget tightness, and as our other student numbers are dropping, I suspect that we will be building more of those over the next few years.

The examples from these participants of new academic programs, investment in recruiting and study abroad, support for international trade, and support for workforce development and industry partnerships are a representative sample of the priorities shared during the interviews. Other participants shared examples of priorities focused on robust data management, advancing opportunities throughout the multicampus system, advancing research, or engaging in robust risk mitigation, all of which were developed by the SIO after gaining an in-depth understanding of the priorities of the institution and aligning their own priorities accordingly.

Assigned Goals and Imposed Responsibilities

Several participants also noted they received their priorities directly from their institution's senior leadership, typically the president or provost. This approach to priority setting overlaps with comments earlier on centering institutional priorities. However, I see this cluster of examples as distinct. Instead of aligning with larger institutional or state-level agendas, for this approach, the international work was *assigned* by senior leadership, drawn more from personal preferences and individual leadership choices of the institutional leader. For example, when

Florence started in their SIO role, they received clear direction from the president and provost.

Florence shared:

At that time, the conversation of internationalization on campus just making sure that whoever applies to go to study abroad was sent abroad. And if students are coming in, make sure the I-20s get issued. The only part that was really working very actively was recruiting students from abroad. But it was low hanging fruit like China and Vietnam and India and a few others. And all the sponsored students from the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, here and there. So that is how the office was working. What the president and provost wanted me to do was develop a broader mindset of what does internationalization mean to us? So that was really my starting point of thinking, how can I bring my global experience to this university? So that's how . . . that's what basically put together the, the president and provost at the time. They approached me and they said, would you please consider this?

All new employees are told the priorities of their positions when they start a new job. However, the president and provost had a specific vision for Florence. In lieu of a traditional search, they sought out Florence and shared their vision for an institution with a broader internationalization mindset, placing global opportunities closer to the center of the institution's teaching and research mission. This type of overt expectation setting from leadership was not common among the participants. To be addressed in the upcoming finding on campus barriers, several institutional leaders demonstrated limited interest in internationalization when compared with the team at Florence's institution.

At Kobe's institution, they also enjoyed a positive relationship with the president and provost, and the leadership also had clear expectations of Kobe as the SIO. However, for Kobe the assigned expectation was keenly focused on international student enrollment growth and revenue. Kobe shared:

As soon as the university reopened for travel after COVID, we had folks and our admission teams engage in international travel to actively recruit students. We also undertook several conversations with external parties that the university was pursuing professional relationships to bring more students to the university. Our president wanted our office to double the amount of students that the university had. So, the president would wanna see and believe that we should have a double of what we had, in terms of

degree-seeking enrolled students on campus for the university of our size. And, and we undertook several efforts to make that happen by starting the enrollment strategy, outlining or getting hands on the budget, so that we can better understand what we can spend and where we can invest the money.

Kobe worked for an academic institution they described as fiscally healthy, without the challenging enrollment circumstances or imminent demographic cliffs that were sometimes described in other locations. Yet, the president of Kobe's institution wanted to see a doubling of international student enrollment. This aspiration was stated explicitly to Kobe and became the primary area of emphasis for Kobe.

In addition to priority setting from senior administrators, several people described an alternative approach to establishing priorities that surprised some participants. I term these as *imposed* responsibilities, as they were neither assigned by leadership nor chosen by the SIO. Rather, the participant inherited a situation that immediately became a priority, usually at the outset of their role in the SIO position. Unfortunately, these participants discovered glaring challenges in their teams that demanded attention. I have removed the pseudonyms for these excerpts to protect the anonymity of the participants and their institutions from potentially embarrassing circumstances. Here are three examples from participants who each inherited a bit of a mess when they started their positions. The participants commented:

Once I started in this position, I inherited an office that had a history of multiple staffing changes, leadership changing . . . there was a sense that this office does not fulfill the need of the university, does not support the students, does not support outgoing students, does not support the faculty in a way that should have been happening. The first task that was handed over to me was to stabilize the office, rethink the functionality, and improve the services.

When I took this job, you know, this office was a mess. Financially, it was a mess. There was no sense of accounting. Our accountant hadn't turned in a real budget for, oh, I don't know how many years. And I mean, one of the reasons why the provost fired my predecessor, and I was asked to step into the role, was because they wanted to cut our budget completely and make us entirely revenue funded. Because they said, I have no idea what goes on in that office financially.

When I interviewed, one of the staff basically said privately, “we have no money.” I later found out the person was right. We had no money. And my first couple of weeks on campus, and, and, and this is really the dirty laundry here.

Again, the comments shared by these three different participants revealed a more common trend than I anticipated. Several of the participants described they were walking into a mess that needed to be cleaned up. The specific stories ran the gamut of unanticipated financial, staffing, service, and reputational issues across the campus. This assortment of issues which the participants felt had been imposed on them became a clarifying call to action that drove priority making for several participants. These areas became a top priority of the participant, detached from institutional priorities, priorities assigned by institutional leaders, or through more formal planning mechanisms.

Revenue-Driven and Opportunity-Driven Priority Setting

Many of the participants talked about major initiatives or projects that became top priorities for them, aligned with programmatic innovation or opportunism. Opportunities to generate or acquire revenue were often cited as a major motivating factor for participant SIOs. Unsurprisingly, where revenue was available, SIOs prioritized these opportunities. For example, Sofia took advantage of an opportunity to advance internationalization activities by supporting a president looking to make major investments in the campus. Sofia shared:

My boss said, you know, the president’s interested in “big moves,” and we ought to put in for one for study abroad, so let’s do it. So, we worked together. I gave my boss a lot of credit for the idea we put in, and I think we received about \$8 million over 5 years. It was significant. We went to town with that.

In this instance, a presidential initiative led to a major increase in support for study abroad initiatives and became the backbone of study abroad support for that SIO. This specific initiative was not part of a formal plan but rather emerged as an opportunity that Sofia and colleagues chose to react to, and with great success.

Florence also pursued big opportunities, although these opportunities did not emerge from institutional leadership. Instead, Florence was able to pursue opportunities to develop a major branch campus in another country, based on personal contacts from earlier in their career.

Florence stated:

We have had two opportunities where we were offered because—and, and all these came because of my personal connections—there were people who are trying to establish a university. An international university in different countries, namely [Country]. They invited us because of my relationship with some of the people in the ministry and in the education sector to come and establish a branch of our university. And they said we would have no expense in it because it's a branch that they want to get established. We just want your expertise to help us educate, guide us even how to build, guide us who to recruit, and then help us get accreditation.

Florence discussed the opportunities in detail, sharing a meaningful amount of start-up and operational funding was included in the opportunity. The goal was to significantly increase enrollment opportunities and visibility through these overseas outposts. The projects ultimately did not progress as designed, a source of great disappointment for Florence. The disappointment stemmed from the missed opportunity for the institution but also from the special opportunities that arose, partly from the personal connections that brought them forward in the first place.

These examples represent several examples of SIOs who demonstrated revenue-motivated opportunism. The opportunities came to participants in this study through many avenues, sometimes through personal contacts and networks, sometimes through alumni contacts, and sometimes through chance. In these cases, the activity in question was not articulated or well-planned. Rather, the priority was established as a reaction to an emerging opportunity. Salvador described how they balance this opportunistic mindset to strategic planning, to the staff's chagrin, saying:

I would say that my style is a mix of strategy with opportunism. I look for opportunities and I respond to them when they arise. But I also got a long-term strategy in place. I think a few of my staff would love to have more of a structured strategy. I talk about it all the

time. I don't write it. But they know it because I tell them all the time. So right now, we're trying to increase the number of international students.

This theme of opportunism, motivated by revenue opportunities, is another key finding from this study.

Divergent Perspectives on Formal Strategic Planning

Salvador's comment regarding the balance between structured planning and reacting to opportunity is a useful segue to the final section of this theme. Another common approach to priority building is a formal planning process. Knight's (1994) internationalization cycle names planning as one of the six primary activities to be a successful internationalization leader. However, the concept of strategic formal planning was a contested topic. Some participants expressed enthusiasm for this approach, whereas others had several critical things to say.

Jai was one participant who ardently supported a formal strategic planning process for their international division. Jai also worked at a university with a clear institution-wide strategic plan and focused on establishing a clear alignment between the institutional strategic plan and the internationalization strategic plan. Jai shared:

I would say the strategic internationalization plan was the foundation. It has to be the foundation, because that really, that made the provost and the deans realize that, okay, you know what? Change is coming here. We've never seen anything like this. We've been here for many years. We've never seen anything like this. It looks like change is coming. Not only that, but the international strategic plan had things in it that the university deeply, deeply cares about. It wasn't a strategic plan that's a few flights away from the university's priorities. It aligned very, very much with what the university is looking for. And so that was also very helpful.

Jai highlighted their internationalization strategic plan was created in direct alignment with the institutional strategic plan. Jai also described a detailed exercise where they gained information from throughout the campus, wrote down primary internationalization objectives, and then received support for that plan from the institution's senior leaders. The internationalization plan

was regularly returned to gain or sustain support for new ideas. The internationalization plan was also a tool used by Jai to support funding requests for new staff, new initiatives, and to mark internationalization achievements on their campus.

Other participants noted they had developed a formal, written, strategic plan using many of the same principles described by Jai. However, they were less successful in using the plan to drive action or to derive intended outcomes. For example, Santiago described how their internationalization strategic plan was used less frequently, but it was still a helpful tool to have. I asked Santiago if they were pleased with their strategic plan, and they responded:

You know . . . yes and no. So, I did it because it's actually the first time that we have one. Not that I have it under my pillow all the time. But we have it, and we can refer to it when we need to. And now I need to figure out how we are going to benchmark and report and so on. It's important that we have it. Every once in a while, I push it into the president's speeches or in other things. So, it's a tool, again, to kind of acknowledge and amplify the many ways that we are serious, right? Every college has one, so we are not an outlier. We are part of the game. So now, with the research office, we actually go back to it. And every year in October, the president has a senior leadership meeting from the entire university and emphasizes different units. We did a major presentation 2 years ago. It kind of keeps international in the minds of others. So, you know, you lobby and advocate all the time.

Santiago talked about the importance of having a strategic plan, but not in the same ways as Jai. Rather than serve as an actionable document that drove outcomes, Santiago saw the plan as a political tool or a communications tool to demonstrate adherence to cultural norms and to use it when it was expedient and beneficial. I noted how Santiago ended the excerpt talking about advocacy, an area of great interest for Santiago that they referred to regularly during our conversation. In that context, seeing the plan as another avenue to advocate was consistent with Santiago's views on leadership.

Jericho had yet another view, arguing the planning process is more important than the actual document that was generated. They noted:

You know how people say, oh, if you just do a strategic plan and it stays on the shelf, it's no good. Right? They're right about that in a way. However, I do think the planning is the thing, right? It's not the plan. The plan is good, but it's the planning because that got everybody excited. That got people's juices flowing. New friendships and collaborations emerged, you know, and it just got a lot of enthusiasm about things going. And then of course, you have to follow up. So that is the plan. The plan helps you follow up. I actually reassigned a staff member to be the strategic plan follow up person and to do the accountability part of it . . . You know, to make sure that we were holding ourselves accountable, including me.

Jericho and Santiago each signaled, in their own way, the planning process and strategic plan were beneficial, but perhaps not because of the traditional reasons that plans were typically viewed as valuable. Rather, for Jericho, the planning process was valuable to convening campus colleagues, inviting conversation and brainstorming, generating ideas and enthusiasm, creating new connections and opportunities for collaboration, and setting broad objectives. As time passed, if the existence of the plan helped address a need or opportunity, the plan was there to help.

However, as noted earlier, many of the actual priorities that participants identified were not created through these formal and intentional planning processes. In fact, the prevailing attitude among the participants in this study was resistance to, cynicism about, or outright avoidance of formal strategic internationalization plans. Some simply followed the preferences modeled by their institutional leaders. I asked Sofia, who had worked for an extended time at their institution, if they had used a strategic plan. Sofia responded:

There was for one era. I think that was around [year to year, several years ago]. And it was, it was something that we paid a lot of attention to all those years ago. But other than that, I would say no. I mean, we had our own internal goals, but they were more broad. Our, our, I mean, [our president] was of the opinion, you know, less meetings and just get it done. You know, you don't need gobs of paper. Just figure it out and get it done [Laugh].

Sofia noted with a laugh that their president did not believe in strategic plans. Interestingly, Medina shared this view in their own pithy way, simply saying, "Uh, our president doesn't like

strategic plans.” Sofia and Medina shared, because their leadership did not believe in formal strategic plans to establish institutional priorities, it would be inappropriate or perhaps even counterproductive for them to create their own formal documents as well.

Sydney shared a possible reason why some senior leadership positions eschew strategic planning devices, especially in higher education. They replied:

The responsibility of senior leadership in higher education is to respond to the immediate crisis du jour, but that makes long-term planning very difficult. The average provost in the United States today lasts less than 3 years. The average president is about as long as an undergraduate. It’s about 4.5 to 5 years, average. How do you create a successful longitudinal strategy when the average length of your presidency dictates that you either inherit somebody else’s plan and are expected to finish it, or you start your own, but never see it to conclusion [laugh]. That’s a huge existential issue for higher ed in the United States.

Sydney’s comment illustrated long-term planning was arguably a feckless exercise in the context of a shifting higher education environment. Florence further addressed the futility of strategic planning in large higher education institutions when the ultimate accountability to advance a common strategic vision was limited and faculty and other employees at the institution were largely free to act as they wish. Florence stated:

What I find is that bureaucracy in education is pretty thick. Even thicker than the federal government. And I think I totally understand the freedom of the faculty and the deans and the academic part of the university. But there is no real way to have system-wide or university-wide strategic priorities set and then be able to make people follow that. Everybody seems to be an island on unto themselves. And everybody seems to be, you know, almost like a freelancer. Okay, I don’t want to do this, so you, you can’t make me.

Whereas Sydney argued institutional leadership cannot complete plans because of the abbreviated terms of leadership, Florence noted institutions did not follow through on plans because there was limited authority from institutional leadership to hold faculty accountable to engage in new work or engage in work differently. Florence’s excerpt was noteworthy, presenting a case for increased authority of senior administrators. Academic freedom and shared

governance have been foundations of the U.S. higher education system, yet they can impede institution-wide progress to achieve other administrative or operational goals. According to Florence, this schism in higher education management was also relevant for discussions on internationalization.

Lastly, Vienna shared a criticism of strategic planning, explaining why the process seemed unhelpful to some SIOs. Again, this excerpt was the response to my question to Vienna about whether they had used a strategic plan to help set priorities as the SIO. Vienna responded:

I would say after maybe 3 years in the role, we did a very, very lengthy examination . . . but by now, we were all actually linked. And we really had to figure out what our mission statement was. And I'm, I'm just not a good strategic planning person. I find it a huge red herring. People invest years of time and money and write a report that it took so long. By the time they wrote it, it's outta date. But because we had now figured out, okay, we are a group and what should we be? We had our four cornerstones. We never did another plan. I was never asked to do another one.

Vienna's comment highlighted the significant investment of time and energy that is sometimes involved in a strategic planning process, with unsatisfying reflections on the productivity of that investment. Vienna's final comment about a plan being out of date was also important to highlight. Future themes in this chapter address the constant state of change experienced by higher education internationalization leaders. It has been extremely difficult to plan when one can expect another major change event is right around the corner, rendering a strategic planning document immediately obsolete. Institutional changes in leadership, the COVID-19 global pandemic, U.S. presidential elections, and geopolitical conflict were all cited as major events with meaningful impacts on internationalization initiatives, all of which were challenging to plan for.

In this theme, I synthesized reflections on *how* SIOs established their priorities. The participants emphasized it was important to focus on the institution's priorities. They also shared

sometimes priorities were assigned by leadership or inherited in the form of challenging circumstances that needed immediate attention. SIOs demonstrated an interest in always being on the lookout for opportunities as they emerged, especially those that generated revenue for the international office or the institution. Finally, although formal strategic planning can be a helpful tool, there was cynicism and outright avoidance of the approach by some.

SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization

This qualitative study explored how SIOs at land-grant institutions developed and implemented internationalization strategies in the face of alternative stakeholder interests at their institutions. Thus far this chapter has focused on SIO responsibilities, and the process or approach used to establish or understand those priorities. Next, the semistructured interviews included an opportunity for each participant to share thoughts on their success in advancing these priorities, leading to an avalanche of frustrations, challenges, and impediments faced on campus.

Participants' examples and anecdotes were wide ranging, falling under four broad subthemes. For this third theme on institutional obstacles, the four subthemes covered in this section include (a) internationalization as a peripheral institutional activity, (b) dismantling the formal authority of the SIO, (c) decentralized systems and the ignored SIO, and (d) budget systems and the pivot to revenue-driven internationalization. This part of the interviews often struck a nerve among the participants. This topic garnered the most attention and often took the most amount of time during each individual interview. Notably, several interviews featured detailed anecdotes about significant challenges that were exceptionally frustrating for participants, leading several to contemplate the future of higher education internationalization and a diminishing lack of enjoyment in their role.

Internationalization as a Peripheral Institutional Activity

Participants shared multiple views on the level of support for internationalization at their institution. For some, the level of support was sufficient or even satisfying. Some of these findings on this specific topic were shared in the previous theme on developing internationalization strategies at a campus. However, I was surprised by several participants who shared, at times in stark ways, that internationalization was not an authentic priority of their institution. Where scholars and prior studies have written that internationalization is increasingly cited as a primary strategic priority (Helms et al., 2017), the findings from my study illustrated an alternative view in practice, implying internationalization may not be the priority that scholars and practitioners believe it to be.

Jericho shared pointed reflections on how their institution's president does not support global engagement. They indicated:

I'm sure it varies at different universities and I'm actually thinking it really varies according to presidential level leadership. Right? So, I'm gonna be very candid here, and I think this probably will be anonymous and be safe because I suspect it's not a singular experience. My president is not a big champion of things global or international. Now, is the president opposed? No. If you push, does the president see value in it? Yes. Is the president nice to international students and speaks well of them? Yes. Is the president keen on education abroad? Yes, thinks it's a good idea. But the president doesn't go out there every day telling people how great it is that [our university] has global connections, or how our research is benefited by our global engagements, or how our classrooms are enriched by their global learning, or by diverse students from around the world.

Although not an overt obstacle to student mobility and faculty engagement globally, the president at Jericho's institution was also not actively supporting or even talking about international work.

Bamako agreed, sharing a story where institutional leadership said international work is less of a priority than in recent years. Bamako described:

And [the institutional leader] said, Bamako, you know that when I came, I really thought global was an important thing for [our institution]. Then they said, but that's not the climate we're in. And maybe the climate will change? But, for now, [the leader] actually used sign language, like body language hand gestures, saying we're not going to put global up here, raising hands [up high]. The leader said, it's kind of, you know, down here [bringing hands down low].

Bamako worked at this institution for several years with this institutional leader. This was a rather stark change in direction and a reprioritization away from global work. The institution had hired Bamako at a time when internationalization was clearly stated in the institution's strategic plan, and there were clear aspirations to advance global activity, particularly in curricular opportunities. However, Bamako noticed for years that action did not meet rhetoric at their institution. This discussion brought clarity to an area of frustration that had been brewing for Bamako. Internationalization was no longer a priority.

Vienna also shared how internationalization was a smaller priority of institutional leadership when compared to prior years. Vienna explained, "Under the current administration, the president and the provost were so disinterested in internationalization, and this was, you know, after COVID, so it was getting harder and harder to get people to do what I asked." Vienna was talking about the shift at their campus, which was occurring concurrently with several other shifts. New leadership had arrived on their campus, along with some uncertain lingering impacts that were common during the post-COVID era. This amalgamation of dynamics led Vienna to believe that internationalization was in retreat at the institution.

Zaria, Kobe, and Sydney each discussed the institution's land-grant mission, understanding their schools prioritized local needs first. Zaria described the mission as highly focused on the needs of counties around the state, sharing:

There's pride in making sure the university runs true to its mission being the land-grant. But what does that mean in the 20th century? Doubling down on being in all counties.

Doubling down on modern versions of extension and engagement, or whatever the counties need.

Zaria's reflection revealed the concept and practical value of the modern-day land-grant institution may not be clearly or commonly understood. When land-grant institutions were established, they provided practical information statewide through extension offices, especially for agricultural communities. The needs of these county-based constituents were changing. However, the goal of the land-grant institution remained focused on meeting these constituent needs, and it can be challenging to identify the global rationale for county-focused activity.

Kobe described a similar tension between serving the local community and operating with a global lens, sharing:

The only challenge with this notion of establishing an office and reprioritizing certain functions to better support our aspirations for global exchanges, was that, as you know, a land-grant university has a very well-defined mission that is embedded within its locality. That is, to serve and support the local community to produce positions and workforce that supports the state.

The top priority of Kobe's institution was advancing the interests of the state, with an emphasis on workforce development. Determining how to fit global exchange alongside or within the context of this local workforce focus has been a difficult challenge for SIOs at land-grant institutions. Finding authentic alignment can be extremely challenging, and without strong institutional leaders, internationalization can be relegated to the back burner.

Sydney described this dynamic for their institution, invoking an ill-defined term *global land-grant*, explaining, "We're a land grant. What does it mean to be a global land grant? That was the 3:00 AM question, right? What does that mean? We are a global land grant." Sydney's comment might be interpreted as innovative and exciting, inviting land-grant institutions and SIOs to imagine how a connection between the local and global could be a benefit. However, without a commonly understood definition of what a global land grant might be and how a global

land grant operates in both global and local geographical spaces simultaneously, this term becomes less helpful in practical application. If there were a more concrete way to frame Sydney's view of global engagement in alignment with a locally focused land grant, that approach might benefit the other participants who noted the land-grant mission appears incongruent with global engagement.

Participants also spoke about other priorities at the institutions. For Zaria, a top institutional priority was increasing student enrollment. This goal was also seen as largely a domestic priority at their institution, having little impact on the international office. Zaria shared, "The university would like to increase enrollment. So that is good and bad for international. It means there's not really a priority for international, but there's not the stress to build the budget model based on international enrollment." I appreciate the bittersweet reflection on this enrollment priority. On the one hand, the way Zaria's institution approached enrollment growth was highly domestic and in-state in orientation. This meant the international office was not a part of addressing this priority. However, not being included was also a source of relief for Zaria, as they did not have ownership or front-line responsibility for a challenging institutional priority.

Paris's story regarding enrollment priorities was even more dramatic. Paris shared:

A couple years ago, we started having some challenges from the board and then from our alums who were under the impression that we were taking away seats from in-state students and giving them to out-of-state students. And for us, that includes our international population. The leadership of the university got pretty nervous because we're still way too dependent on state money, unlike a lot of other public institutions. And so, they were concerned that if we continued down that path, we would run into some bigger issues from our stakeholders. So, they backed away from out-of-state enrollment. I think the balance of new college students is capped at 30% out-of-state students. The international cap becomes [less than 100] new undergraduate students.

At Paris's institution, they decided to cap the enrollment of new international undergraduate students to less than 100, a stunningly low number for an institution of their size and profile.

However, this decision was made in the context of their land-grant mission and priority to ensure that as many in-state students as possible could attend the university. The political winds of the state, as well as the continued reliance on state funds, led to outcomes that had a chilling impact on international student enrollment.

Conversely, when internationalization does become a priority, that is a cause for celebration. Bamako shared this amusing story to highlight how the team's work had gone from a footnote in an institutional strategic document to a line on the written plan in the early years of their career. Bamako commented:

It was in October, 'cause we celebrated that we'd become a bullet point. Like the team. We had some kind of reception, had gotten a party, and we said we've left the parentheses and we're now a bullet point! And I threatened to dress as a bullet point for Halloween.

This section illustrated institutional priorities were important in determining the fate and success of the SIO. For some participants, it could be frustrating when institutions did not prioritize international engagement in favor of other pressing institutional priorities.

Dismantling the Formal Authority of the SIO

As SIOs shared anecdotes and reflections on how internationalization was a diminishing priority at their institution, they simultaneously shared how their role as SIOs appeared to be diminishing. The stories that supported this finding included examples of perceived or real demotions in title and reporting structure, disinvited attendance at senior leadership meetings at the institution, and being excluded from relevant and important campus conversations.

Jericho's experience provided a helpful bridge between the perception of diminishing interest in internationalization as an institutional priority and its impact on SIOs and their international teams. In this vivid story, Jericho posited the rise of the SIO position, seen over the

last several decades (Di Maria, 2019a), could easily be undone in the coming years. Jericho shared:

I honestly think we've talked about this a lot. It's, it's leadership. It's leadership at the university, you know, so if the leadership at the university really decides that international is irrelevant, I mean, I could see a scenario, worst case scenario, I could see them firing me. I could see them collapsing what we do into other units. So, put education abroad in student affairs, put international student scholars somewhere else. Put international risk under, I don't know, risk management, the VP for risk management. Put global health under some healthcare thing. I could see it. Put recruitment under enrollment management. Bingo. You don't have an international center, you don't have a strategy. You know, I could see that. Worst case scenario.

This excerpt from Jericho reminded me the role of the SIO and the presence of a comprehensive international office are not permanent systems within the higher education landscape. Jericho described how the functions attached to the international office could, with relative ease, be reassigned to other divisions, allowing for the removal of the SIO entirely. This choice could be made by institutional leaders looking for cost savings. Jericho shared this scenario in the context of a significant organizational shift they experienced, which had them reporting to a different institutional leader with less positional influence and authority than they were used to enjoying. Jericho recalled, "I'll tell you candidly, I almost quit when I was told that. I was like, you are f'ing kidding. Basically. Like, you cannot do this to me. This is ridiculous, you know?" This change was unpleasant for Jericho, giving them less positional authority at their institution. Yet, the experience was not isolated. Several other participants talked about other shifts that similarly marginalized the SIO. For example, Kingston talked about being removed from a major committee at their institution, noting:

My first couple years on this job, we did participate in the Council of Deans. We're not anymore, we are part of the broader leadership group that includes all associate deans, directors of any institutes and the deans and the vice provosts. So, it's a bigger leadership council. I definitely miss being on the Council of Deans.

Kingston revealed there were several key leadership groups on their campus. Their council of deans talked more substantively and candidly about issues and concerns and acted as a key policy making body. In contrast, the leadership forum was a larger group used to report on decisions made in other settings. With this change in participation, Kingston had less ability to shape institutional policy, some of which featured impacts on international populations and activities.

Bamako similarly shared how they were disinclined to important meetings on campus, purportedly at the deans' requests, commenting:

Rumor is that the deans felt that we shouldn't be there, because they discussed things that we shouldn't be part of. So, we stopped being invited to those. . . . If I think about recent years, as things started to break down, you know, there were conversations going on, where task forces or committees were formed, that the provost should have said, the Senior International Officer needs to be there.

Bamako also revealed, in addition to leadership committees, other campus-wide task forces and work groups might have been appropriate for the SIO to attend. However, in this instance, the SIO was not invited into those spaces either.

Santiago described the dynamics on their campus as highly political. They noted the natural state of internationalization, and the role of the SIO started from a perspective of constantly clamoring for attention and resources. Santiago felt it was up to the SIO to act and work the political system of the institution, to stay known or relevant, or as Santiago called it, to stay in face. Santiago said:

They wouldn't acknowledge this, but there is this kind of politics which marginalizes what we do. No matter what. We are doing the work. Everybody is happy. But it's hard to push it over the barrier of constant . . . oh, you know . . . it's just the institutional culture. We have to constantly do things to stay in face. You know, for leadership to remember us.

Sofia agreed with Santiago, sharing the role of SIO is systemically designed as having limited real influence and authority, starting from a secondary or subordinate position within the hierarchy of the institution. Sofia mentioned:

This role that we have in international education, we are very much all about influential power because nobody, nobody across campus has to listen to you or do anything you recommend because they don't report to you. And often their success, or the metrics upon which they're measured, aren't really influenced by what you do. So, influential power is very important. And that can often be achieved through financial incentives. Just a strong reputation. Good ideas. A combination of all of them probably is the best.

Sofia's comment that no one must listen to the SIO was important. The SIO was constrained by limited oversight and a portfolio of responsibilities that can be viewed as supplemental or secondary to other campus priorities, typically led by other figures at the institution. In this context, the role of the SIO was to generate value through good ideas, financial outcomes, good reputation, and influential power.

As a final anecdote, Salvador shared a story about a faculty member who arrived at their institution with professional experience at a different university. They compared the positional authority of SIOs across institutions, which was a bit frustrating for Salvador. Salvador explained:

We had a faculty come in and he used to work at [another university]. He comes to me and says, "Well, what are you doing about this? What are you doing about Fulbright? What are you doing about this? What are you doing?" And it's all these things that I can't do. I don't have the ability to do it.

Salvador indicated through this comment that institutions are different. The scope and authority of the SIO looks different from context to context. In some contexts, the SIO may feel their work was a priority and they had the positional authority and access to advance their work successfully. However, as Salvador learned, in some contexts, the SIO had limited or less authority than in other places. This diminished authority can be a substantial challenge for SIOs.

Decentralized Systems and the Ignored SIO

The first two subsections of this theme on campus impediments focused first on internationalization as a diminished priority and second on how the formal authority of the SIO can also be diminished. This section addresses the higher education ecosystem, with decentralized systems, silos, and other practices that impeded the SIO from advancing internationalization on their campus. Bamako reflected on the challenge of serving in a campus-wide leadership role at a decentralized campus where authority is delegated to the college or administrative division, sharing.

I'm sure a theme that you hear over and over again is leading in a decentralized organization, and not having control over what's happening or, or even sometimes knowledge of what's happening in the various areas of campus, whether academic units or other divisions.

Bamako highlighted how higher education institutions can struggle with challenges with communication and coordination, especially when decentralization was a feature of the organizational ethos. Bamako's comment that decentralization was likely a common theme across the participants was prescient, as several participants also talked about the challenges of understanding institutional priority and activity and were disappointed about being engaged less frequently than they would prefer. In Bamako's situation, the issue of decentralization led to being entirely omitted or disregarded from the work of others on campus, even on internationalization initiatives.

Kobe discussed a different dynamic, specifically how an inaccurate and narrow perception of their office was problematic. For Kobe, the campus only viewed the work of the international office as related to student mobility activities. This situation was a narrow view that Kobe worked intentionally to overcome. Kobe explained:

I often believed that this office did not have a well-established identity on campus, because people didn't know what it did. We had so many functions that we housed in one place. And they knew of that office, in terms of the faculty and the administration, most of the time they knew that this is a study abroad office, and that's the umbrella under which people recognized it. But they did not know all the other smaller and bigger activities that we were handling and supporting for the university.

Similarly, Zaria struggled to gain traction on their campus and worked diligently to position the office as having broader institutional responsibilities beyond the student mobility tasks that it was known for. Zaria commented:

I don't think we've made inroads. Some see us as transactional and not as leaders in the field. . . . The ones who work with us, they see us as helpful. Then the ones who have sorta ignored us and we haven't been proactive in trying to bring them back to us, sort of just see us as transactional.

The gap between the perceived and actual roles of the international office was an important finding in this study. As SIOs worked to embrace a more comprehensive approach to internationalization, beyond student mobility responsibilities, they were seeking to advance internationalization throughout teaching and research, and by embedding international work across all institutional priorities. However, these aspirations and broader responsibilities were not typically well known or accepted across the campus. Instead, returning to findings from Theme 1 in this chapter, campus colleagues viewed the international office as simply the study abroad and international student visa office, often limiting their role and scope.

Participants also shared stories and reflections illustrating the obstacles they faced, ranging from unhelpful or disinterested colleagues, lack of authority to advance an agenda, and an overall apathy to internationalization activities. For example, Jericho and Santiago had each identified alumni engagement and fundraising as major priorities for their work. However, they each described difficulties in garnering the attention and basic support from the alumni and advancement offices. Jericho's comments on alum data management are first, followed by

Santiago's comments regarding strained efforts to work with the fundraising team. Santiago shared:

You wouldn't believe how bad [data management regarding alumni] is here. And then we'll give data back to alumni, right? We'll give it to them, we'll clean it, put it in their system, whatever it's called, and then we'll hopefully be able to use it like we're sort of partnering to get it done. But we're doing it, you know, because they just don't do it.

I had no foundation support. I had no support from the actual unit that does fund fundraising. So, I had a couple of people who had kind of helped me on the side, but it wasn't in their job description. They weren't expected to spend time on it. Whereas a college has a team of six or seven who do that development work, I had nobody, other than whoever I could get 10 minutes out of them in a phone call or something.

These excerpts from both Jericho and then Santiago painted a picture of lacking support from the alumni and fundraising offices, which presented distinct challenges for Jericho and Santiago to engage with alum and raise money. In both cases, the participants suggested they were stuck with indifferent campus partners and were required to proceed with this work alone.

Medina similarly talked about challenges working with other offices and staff colleagues. When Medina was looking to make operational changes that would simplify administrative steps and improve operational support for international students, Medina faced unwilling partners who impeded making the needed change. Medina said they received this response from staff colleagues, commenting, "There's a lot of, well, that's the policy. Or that's the way we've always done it, without a lot of questioning. I can't do my job effectively because this other office isn't doing theirs." For Medina, the resistance to taking new steps was a source of sustained frustration that was having a direct impact on their ability to serve international students effectively.

Several participants made critical claims of faculty as well, finding it difficult to get their attention, support, or involvement in new activities. Sydney described the challenge of working with faculty, sharing:

Don't ask faculty to put 46 hours into a 45-contact hour pot. They can't do that. And they'll tell you, "my 45 hours is full!" But I'm not asking you to do anything more. I'm asking to think about it differently.

Sydney's comment focused on the time constraints of faculty, aiming to make effort more productive instead of adding extra effort, when it comes to advancing internationalization ideas. However, the argument clearly was ineffective in Sydney's interaction with faculty.

Florence and Lucia each shared even sharper reflections on working with deans or faculty, especially when the internationalization idea or opportunity featured change management or a new initiative. Florence, for example, was pursuing a big idea to bring some of their institution's instruction overseas. Senior leadership was supportive, and the initial contours of the idea were compelling. Unfortunately for Florence, the idea was scuttled by a handful of influential deans. Florence shared:

My most frustrating thing was when we had these really cool ideas, nobody seemed to be able to convince the deans. If they don't wanna do it, it doesn't happen. . . . If there is a way to achieve an institutional goal, and this is a way to achieve it, then everybody needs to pull in the same direction. But people don't.

Lucia built on this theme of having trouble getting campus stakeholders enthusiastic and engaged in new internationalization initiatives. Whereas Florence focused on deans, Lucia focused on the faculty, saying:

Maybe I'll just lay it out there right now, which is that [pause] our faculty are extremely resistant to change or anything that, to them, feels like backsliding from the purest ideals of highest academia.

Lucia's frustration emanated from a perception that faculty support for internationalization did not meet their expectations or aspirations. For Lucia, the root cause was attributed to an aversion to change, or innovative programming that moved the institution away from traditional activities. For Vienna, they described their challenges working with faculty in more simple terms, stating:

I had some money for faculty. I gave them a lot of money, any chance I could. I'd promote something and give money. But on a day-to-day basis, they didn't report to me. I didn't have any power. I couldn't either reward or punish.

Vienna highlighted a different dynamic that impeded their ability to gain faculty attention, one of systemic structure and power. For Vienna, the challenge was rooted in a lack of authority and oversight, limiting Vienna's ability to make their internationalization priority one that was shared by the faculty across the institution. Vienna's observation about limited authority was a statement that captured this finding of limited authority on a decentralized campus and the challenges of working with staff, faculty, and campus leaders who did not share the SIO's priority.

I end this section on a positive note by returning to Kobe. As noted earlier in this section, Kobe was working to adjust the identity of the international office. They shared more about the view of the international office when they started in their role, and how the dynamic started to positively change over time. Kobe indicated:

The other thing that I'm very proud of is how we've been able to bring the global office to the conversation. All things relate to, I mean, all things, when it comes to you know, the academic experience, how do we support students? Global is now central to every conversation. And it wasn't before. It wasn't before. It was just a standalone office. It was perceived as an administrative unit where you go and sign maybe immigration documents and what have you. But the office was never central to the university conversation, and that has changed drastically. Drastically. Even the reporting line has changed. This position was not reporting to a provost. I'm the first one, actually. I'm the first one to report to a provost. All of my predecessors, everybody who was in this seat before, they never reported to a provost.

Kobe spoke with striking pride on the evolution of the international office from the periphery to being central at their institution. As several participants spoke about their frustrations, Kobe's story of a positive evolution stood out among the participants. The emphasis on the elevated reporting line to the provost highlighted the point. Kobe's story reminded me each context was

different and that although circumstances can be frustrating, they can also evolve and become positive.

This subtheme focused on the relationship between the SIO and the rest of the campus. When a campus did not prioritize internationalization, as noted in the first part of this theme, and when the SIO was at risk of having their positional authority minimized, discussed in the second part of this theme, a reasonable person might anticipate the rest of the campus might also minimize the work of the SIO. Some deans, faculty, and staff colleagues were all accused of being difficult partners by participants. Of course, there were also circumstances of high-quality collaboration. That positive connection existed where the SIOs invested a significant portion of their time building alliances, to be discussed in Theme 5 of this chapter. However, SIOs depended on a collaborative campus ecosystem to advance internationalization activities. Where the SIO encountered barriers, those were difficult circumstances to overcome.

Budget Systems and the Pivot to Revenue-Driven Internationalization

Data from this study suggest another impediment to internationalization in higher education focuses on circumstances related to financial expectations and systems. Medina confronted a surprising expectation early in their SIO career, describing:

When I came on board, that was definitely an expectation. Let's go out there and find insanely rich international people and have them build centers and send us students and invest money. Which honestly, when the enrollment started dropping, hurt us, because there was this perception on our side that people with big pockets needed to give us things in exchange for the opportunity to come to the United States. And on the international side, there was this perception of, you just want me to be a cash cow. And you know, that, that's not us. So, today, we're not expected to bring in vast sums of money from a purely revenue generating standpoint.

Medina's story introduced, for some SIOs, the international office existed to generate international student tuition, a cash cow for the institution. Kobe carried this theme further, sharing:

International students pay out-of-state tuition. So, obviously, international tuition revenue made things available at low cost or no cost to the domestic in-state students. A lot of the services that were being funded, even scholarships for domestic in-state students, because it's a land-grant university, so we were bringing international students to gain additional funding to make things happen for the in-state and domestic students, right?

Medina and Kobe each shared a provocative observation with candor, namely, that revenue generated by international students was a top priority for the institution. In the case of Medina, there were histories of generating revenue from wealthy international students, a circumstance that was expected to be repeated. For Kobe, international student tuition was used to subsidize the presence of in-state students at their campus, allowing in-state tuition to be cheap and in-state scholarships to be plentiful, funded at least partially by international students.

This revenue imperative impacted other higher education administrators. Lucia talked about this revenue demand as permeating their institution and motivating the deans' actions.

Lucia stated:

We are a very decentralized university with very strong deans. And so, a lot of the revenue stays there, especially for the graduate programs. So, you know, the deans are interested in raising that revenue because then it increases their part of money.

Lucia was talking about the power of deans on their campus, motivated to generate revenue. This created various incentives and disincentives on campus, including generating revenue for the deans. For some SIOs and scholars, this clamoring for cash was seen as inherently problematic for the field of international education, as it became an overwhelming issue for practitioners in the field, some of whom preferred to focus on other areas of need, such as student learning, international student success, and faculty engagement. However, as Sofia noted, the demand for revenue drove action on their campus. Sofia said, "Purists, international education purists say, oh, they should be doing it because it's the right thing to do. Well, that's true, but money talks. Moreso than your purest thinking."

Similarly, Medina talked about revenue's primary role in higher education. Medina and I discussed access to resources at their institution and noted resource restrictions are a fundamental part of the higher education industry. Medina shared:

I wish there were times we could just be all lovey dovey with an unlimited pool of funds. And then other times I think, no, there's a reason higher ed in America is what it is. And it's, it's a, a goal to achieve.

Several participants also spoke about institutional budget models that drove decision making, and several spoke about the impact of the responsibility centered management (RCM) budget model on their campus. RCM models are based on incentives, designed to send more money to the academic departments and colleges that have more students enrolled in their classes and programs. Over time, departments with fewer students will likely have fewer funds in their budgets. Different institutions will apply this broad model in unique ways. However, the RCM system incentivizes departments and programs with higher enrollment, pushing the university to make enrollment growth a significant goal. Zaria described how the RCM model impacted behavior and support for international students on their campus, sharing:

I don't really wanna blame the RCM model but I'm going to. RCM considers international students as out-of-state students . . . Let me put this way, I'll use the [college] dean because they told me this. The dean really doesn't care whether the out-of-state student is from the United States or Chinese. From a financial point of view, it gets lumped into the big bucket and the college gets X percent of the tuition . . . The dean would like international students, but the incentives are what they are . . . Financially, right now, there's really not a whole lot of financial incentives by the colleges within the RCM model to distinguish between international and out of state.

Zaria's comment illustrated how deans can have nuanced views on international student enrollment in their college. On the one hand, enrollment derived revenue from their college, which was at a higher out-of-state rate. This led to some interest in attracting more international students into their college. However, the amount of revenue was identical for the domestic and international out-of-state students, causing the dean to be agnostic or disinterested in another

student characteristics, placing limited value on other intangible or nonfinancial benefits international students might bring to the college.

Paris similarly discussed how their international office was viewed, largely as a revenue engine for colleges through the RCM model. Paris commented:

I think there's an expectation that, as a service unit in an RCM model, I'm expected to help the colleges figure out how to generate revenue. Because what I keep hearing from the provost is, if the deans tell me they think what you're doing is valuable, then that is where you're gonna derive your success from. So, I spend a lot of time now thinking about how to get the deans to say what we're doing is of value.

Paris's reflection was illuminating, tying together several threads in this theme. First, the value of the SIO was determined, at least partially, by the impressions of deans and their satisfaction with the SIO. Next, a dean's satisfaction was derived mainly through a revenue or enrollment lens. This dynamic impacted Paris's work as SIO, encouraging them to spend time currying the favor and approval of deans, as that would ultimately play a role in how they were viewed on campus.

Kingston, however, worked at an institution that did not have an RCM model. Kingston observed colleges were not all that interested in international student enrollment and wondered if their school did embrace an RCM model, elevating the importance of enrollment growth, perhaps then international students might be seen as more valuable to deans. Kingston shared:

If we ever move to a financial model where departments need to have students to have resources, I think suddenly they will be really looking to our office for support. We don't have that kind of a, well, we don't have any kind of RCM model right now.

The RCM model sounded attractive to Kingston, but those using it found the enrollment focus challenging.

This theme addressed the impediments that SIOs faced while attempting to advance internationalization on their campus. The impediments were significant, including a lack of

priority toward international work, a minimization of the positional authority of the SIO, decentralized systems, a lack of institutional awareness of what the SIO can be expected to achieve, and financial incentives and systems that also impact the work of the SIO. These campus dynamics were significant; however, other impacts existed beyond the campus ecosystem that also impacted the work of the SIO.

SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels

Returning to the overall research questions guiding this study, the second research question asked: How do external forces (e.g., geopolitical conflict, global pandemics) influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies? As drafted, this research question included an admitted bias toward global events. To address this research question, I asked participants about events beyond the campus and anticipated reflections on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, the increasingly hostile relationship between the United States and China, or the COVID-19 global pandemic. While entering this portion of each interview, I casted a wide net, inviting participants to take this conversation in any direction. Although global events were certainly addressed, I was surprised several participants focused on factors at the national or state level. For example, some participants focused on U.S. government issues (e.g., visa issuance, the then-forthcoming 2024 Presidential election). Other participants chose to talk about factors at the state level, notably reflections on their local political environment that was sometimes unfriendly to international students and global engagement.

This theme synthesizes reflections on external dynamics that impede SIOs and internationalization with this geographic framework in mind. I first addressed global geopolitical

conflicts and crises, followed by national policy barriers and potential Presidential problems, and concluded with state funding constraints and political pressures.

Global Geopolitical Conflicts and Crises

Several participants noted areas of the world were in turmoil. At the time of data collection, during Summer 2024, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was over a year old. The crisis in Gaza was active, with threats of a widening conflict that might spiral to include Iran, Lebanon, and other countries in that region. The U.S. Presidential political campaign often referred to international affairs with highly negative tones, branding China as a threat to U.S. national interests and suggesting immigration on the United States–Mexico border was a national emergency. During this time, there were reports of Russia, China, Iran, and North Korean leaders exploring a new alliance, aspiring to be an adversary to the United States. Media and politicians alike painted a picture of the world as an inherently threatening place. Altogether, participants acknowledged the world was seen as increasingly dangerous. Jai provided this extended rundown of the state of the world and its possible impact on internationalization, sharing:

The Middle East, how unstable it is today with, you know, Israel and Palestine. That is gonna have, and Iran of course, that is gonna have serious implications on international education, right? In terms of mobility and what have you. Of course, the Ukraine–Russia war, right? Is, is another. How do we continue to open our doors for the best and brightest scholars from those countries like Ukraine? Places like that? We have not been able to, to do that much because, you know, that effort has been disrupted over the last 2 years because of the Russia–Ukraine war. So those things are worrisome. If nobody is worried about it, then I don't think then their vision for international is in the right place. International education, or internationalization, is not just about, you know, sending students abroad and attracting international students. We've got to be able to think about how we avail ourselves to scholars all around the world so that they can have an opportunity to come to us and contribute to the academic enterprise. And that has been disrupted both in the Middle East and in the Ukraine war. And I think that's worrisome. The other thing that's worrisome is, is that there is also so much turmoil nowadays around the world. There is the Middle East. There is the Ukraine war. There is Sudan that's currently going through a very serious civil war. I think that has now elevated the refugee crisis to new heights. All of those things are going to have an impact on migration and on international education as a whole.

Jai chose to focus attention on areas of the world with militarized conflict. These areas were dangerous regions where travel and mobility stopped for activities related to higher education. Jai also noted the mobility of faculty and scholars was just as important as the mobility of students and defined the halt of activity as worrisome, with long-term impacts likely for refugees, migration, and international education.

Vienna agreed with Jai that the global context was exceptionally challenging but focused less on the zones of conflict and instead painted a bleak picture that included disease and general hatred. Vienna then pointed out this negativity not only hampered international activity broadly but may have elevated disinterest from campus leadership. Vienna shared:

I think we struggle now to explain what it is we do . . . You know, you cannot open the paper and not see eight stories about conflict and hatred and inability to travel and illnesses, you know, disease. I mean, so it's like we need to explain it. Like why should we be global? I don't know how SIOs go to a president now to explain something new and exciting that they want support for.

Vienna illustrated the challenging global context in which SIOs operate and immediately connected the examples to how this can hamper interest in internationalizing their campus.

Whereas Vienna focused on senior leadership's lack of interest, Kingston talked about the potential for dwindling interest from others on their campus, saying:

So what's happening in Ukraine and what's happening in the Middle East are killers when it comes to developing those new programs. Partly because, you know, we've been doing a lot of work in Central Asia and it's, it just, people feel a little bit tentative about that part of the world. And then in the Middle East, so many of our students come from there. And then we have a lot of programs there and how we evaluate what's safe and what's not and what we should be doing, what the timeframe of dislocation is gonna be, those have been really complicated.

Kingston focused on students, pointing out that outbound study abroad, international student enrollment growth, and support for students from these regions were all areas of concern.

Kingston's institution had a strong history of collaboration with institutions in the Middle East.

They hoped to reactivate some of those activities, so the increased regional tensions were a source of frustration and concern.

Lucia took a broader and more futuristic view, which was especially gloomy. Rather than provide a rundown of current events or focus on the challenges of encouraging presidents and students to engage in global work in a complex world, Lucia expressed concern the future may be far worse, saying:

I do think that the situation in the Middle East has real potential for derailing internationalization efforts for a while to come. And I don't just mean the student protests and the Students for Justice in Palestine and so on. I think that's a part of it. But, you know, the wider instability with Iran, with Turkey and some of those, the inability to sort of know from one day to another, who your allies are in a geopolitical sense and where you can invest and cannot invest? And I think that's really gonna make things more difficult. I mean, you know, the whole Iran–Russia nexus that's developing. Iran and China. I think that whole region is, is now spilling out. Or you could say China is spilling in via Russia into Iran, however you want to look at it. Yeah, I think that that would be my gloomiest of outcomes, is just continued volatility and instability in the Middle East and the Caucasuses.

Lucia painted a geopolitical picture that led to new geopolitical alliances forming, perhaps leading to a Cold War or perhaps even something more deadly. The prospect of an emerging nexus of geopolitical power linking Iran, Russia, and China as a rival global superpower to the United States and its dwindling community of allies would likely create enormous barriers to internationalization. Lucia raised relevant concerns the state of the world may get extremely bleak in the future.

Lucia was the first to invoke China from these excerpts, but not the only participant to focus on the frosty relationship with China. Salvador focused on the weakening United States–China partnership, partly because this was an area of specific interest and acumen earlier in their career. Salvador noted:

I spent the better part of my career trying to build ties with China. Now I find myself dismantling those very ties, right? And it's a result both of Chinese policy, but also

American attitudes. So, the reason our programs are probably not gonna exist beyond 2026, number one, the Chinese Ministry of Education has made it so tough to do a dual degree at this point, that it's just not worth our effort. It's not, it's not worth it. It's hard to sustain. It's almost impossible to sustain. Secondly, this state is likely to pass legislation this year. Meaning we can have no relationship with China, like [another state] did last year, right?

Salvador remembered a time not long ago when China was a central strategic area of interest for higher education internationalization. Just one decade ago, Chinese student enrollment soared in the United States, branch campuses from the United States proliferated in China, institutions hosted Chinese language programs through Confucius Institutes, and student mobility and faculty collaboration with China were cited as major institutional priorities at U.S. land-grant institutions. However, changes in political and popular attitudes between the United States and China have significantly shifted in ways that depicted the other country as an adversary.

Sofia also focused on their perceptions of challenges to student enrollment, scholar mobility, and even the end of the Confucius Institutes. Sofia indicated:

The tensions, political tensions between China and the U.S. I think it hurt some of the flow students and scholars between universities, between institutions. You saw it nationwide with the Confucius Institutes, how they were affected by that. Those are two that come to mind. We haven't been affected by it, but I know a lot of others have.

Thus far, this section has focused on global challenges and the negative reactions shared by SIOs that impeded student activity, faculty activity, and internationalization at their institution. However, some participants were looking for a silver lining amid the pessimism. Jai optimistically suggested, as the world becomes increasingly hostile, this may lead to new opportunities for higher education to take a leadership role in improving the global state of affairs by bridging people and ideas. For example, political leaders may turn to higher education to address global conflict in productive ways rather than hide from the world. Jai mentioned:

I guess there is a silver lining to this because I just said earlier that the world is currently on fire. There's so many wars and civil wars, and you've got the Middle East, you've got

Ukraine–Russia War, and you’ve got Sudan and all these places. While that may be very concerning, I think the silver lining to that is that, I think the more that those things are going on with Ukraine and with the Middle East, the more I think university leaders, legislatures, politicians, will continue to realize the importance of international education in terms of making this world a more peaceful place. At the end of the day, that’s what this work is all about. How do we create knowledge and ideas that we can share with others that are different than us? And as a result of that, how do we bring understanding and peace to the world? That is essentially the foundation of international education. So that’s what I mean when I say there is a silver lining to this. You know, while the world is on fire, I’m hoping that there is gonna be a turning point where people will realize that we need each other more than ever before.

Santiago was also optimistic but for a different reason. Where Jai hoped the work of internationalization might be valued to address complex problems, Santiago hoped the role of the SIO would be valued to help their institution navigate an increasingly complex world. Santiago shared:

It’s a no brainer that we are becoming the foreign policy offices in a very strong way, because we are guiding the campus in all kinds of ways. Everything international comes my way. So, take geopolitics. This whole realignment right now going on with China, with India, with Taiwan, Indonesia, Russia, wars, the Middle East, I mean, man, <laugh>, it’s like Ukraine! It never ends. And you know, they were our partners, and now it’s much harder to do the work because of geopolitics. Politics is risk management because travel is much more complicated. It’s less safe.

In this excerpt, Santiago implied universities may need to develop internal foreign policies and practices to navigate challenges and mitigate various risks, including campus travel. This role of guiding where an institution might work and what types of initiatives it might choose to prioritize may be increasingly vital. To Santiago, the SIO should emerge as a central institutional figure to help guide strategic internationalization in an increasingly complex world.

I end this section on the global ecosystem with a comment from Sydney, who embraced a long-term horizon on this issue. Sydney said:

My optimism lies in the fact that, wherever I go in the world, the people are lovely. Their governments stink. But the people are lovely. So, you know, Senator Fulbright was right. It’s people-to-people diplomacy, stupid. And I’m optimistic that we’ll continue to do that.

By invoking Senator Fulbright, a post-World War II political figure who led the movement for governments to fund higher education international exchange to promote global cooperation, Sydney's comments reminded me the current season of increased conflict was not novel. As governments were increasingly hostile, the challenges to lead internationalization were real. In this environment, SIOs should focus on what was possible to continue to build opportunities for international engagement among people.

National Policy Barriers and Potential Presidential Problems

The data for this study were collected during the summer of 2024, during the height of the U.S. Presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. During the data collection period, the race was still considered within the margin of error, and the outcome was far from certain. Even so, several participants expressed agitation that the future outcome of the Presidential campaign might have highly negative consequences for the work of SIOs. Jericho relayed this story from when the initial travel ban was announced during President Trump's first administration, saying:

I came in early, like around eight or something. And I was in my office and the very first person I saw was a young male undergraduate from either Pakistan or Bangladesh, I'm forgetting. And he was really shaken. He had been harassed on his way to his 8:00 AM class on that Monday. So, the next thing that happened was a bunch of the Muslim student association showed up and wanted to have a meeting in our office. And I said, of course, you know, and we supported them, the Indonesian students showed up, you know, it was, it was awful from the minute that that thing went into effect, you know? And I just think though . . . I just do not wanna see, and, and you know, it'll be worse, you know, next time. And I just don't, I'm just dreading that, absolutely dreading that, for what it means for our students more than anybody, you know? I think it's unfortunate for your research, but the timing is such that I think everybody is probably gonna say the same thing, which is . . . I'm so worried about the election in the U.S. And I am like, I honestly probably go to bed at night and wake up every morning thinking about it, not necessarily in a very productive way, but thinking about that. And how, how our world is gonna be very, very, very changed if one of the candidates wins.

We now know President Trump and the Republican party won the 2024 election. Jericho's fears for what a second administration brings appear to have been validated. Hallmarks of 2025 have included a slew of legally dubious Executive Orders, rhetorical attacks on close allies, the possible launch of new trade wars, unilateral budget cuts to education and global engagement, disruptive change to visas, and the deportation of lawfully present international residents without basic due process. Chapter 5 includes a discussion on the Trump administration in the context of this dissertation. Returning to Jericho's fears, international students, scholars, and employees were already expressing anxiety and dread, and as these actions are sustained, the potential damage to international engagement cannot be understated.

Future scholars will write about the long-term impact of the Trump Administration on higher education. For this study, participants shared the U.S. government enjoyed powerful tools to support or impede people's mobility, impacting the work of SIOs in significant ways. Jai shared a personal reflection on shifts they are seeing in the United States and expressed fear for the long-term impact, saying:

People have to remember that many international students come to the United States because they have so much respect and admiration for the United States institutions and democracy. Right? As the strongest democracy, it used to be the strongest democracy in the world, people used to look at the United States as the beacon of the world, setting that example, you know? If that example is lost, where we are no longer the beacon of the world, where they don't look at us the same way they used to look at us, that is gonna have some serious implications on our ability to continue to attract students . . . To be in the face of the, the possibility of, maybe democracy dying in the U.S., is really scary to me. That's why I'm losing sleep at night over this. I really am. I'm taking it very personally.

Jai painted an idealized picture of the United States. I anticipate others will hold different views of the United States, and I honor all those perceptions. However, these views were a part of Jai's journey and were authentic to their lived experience. These comments also helped illustrate the evolving perspective of the United States as an attractive destination for international students.

Historically, international students have been drawn to the United States. However, that positive view has changed, and support for international students could be seriously threatened as political leadership and policy choices damage respect for the country abroad.

The next excerpts focus on international populations and the visa process. First, a simple overview of this process is important here. International students who studied in the United States must go through a multistep process to receive a visa, including review and approval from an overseas embassy or consulate office, to receive official government permission to come into the United States as a student. That visa is valid until the student earns their degree. Then, after graduation, international students can apply for the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, which allows international student graduates to remain in the United States for 1–3 years for work experience. In addition to student visas, individuals without U.S. citizenship or work authorization status who want to work at an institution of higher education in the United States must also engage in this formal approval process from the U.S. Government for employment. All these groups apply for and engage in a complex process that, when successful, generates a visa from the U.S. Government, enabling individual to enter the country.

Sofia observed these student and work visa processes can be extremely cumbersome and slow. The U.S. Government can intentionally or unintentionally create significant delays and hardship throughout this process. Politicians in power have significant ability to slow and even curb the inbound flow of future students and employees into U.S. higher education institutions. Sofia shared:

Regulations and turnaround time. Processing times for Department of Labor [DOL] and Department of Homeland Security are always challenging. I think more so than ever, particularly DOL. And it's been really hard to try to hire new international faculty and staff, particularly faculty. And the amount of oversight for students on OPT is just, you know, so great that it's created a whole new monster of oversight and, and just meticulous data keeping. How to deal with that is important. And so, for the ISSS part

with the student component, we just had to hire more people for DOL processing times and so on.

Sofia focused on how cumbersome policies and the burden of oversight created challenges for international offices, requiring increased staffing at their institution. Sofia happened to work at a larger institution where they had sufficient resources to hire a large staff to take on these responsibilities. Sydney, however, expressed serious concern about how restrictive visa policies and practices hampered an institution's ability to even get international students onto their campuses, talking about the exorbitantly high visa denial rates from the U.S. government.

Sydney explained:

There's another inherent example. The denial rates. The denial rates out of Nigeria may hit 85% this year. And the logic is that these are students who can't prove they'll be financially independent a year after they come to the United States. Okay. Okay. Okay. So, let's look at that, shall we? Because it sure looks like you're a bunch of racist bastards, [laugh]. So, so our visa system is an inherent and dangerous . . . it's a breaking point.

Sydney and Sofia each pointed out the U.S. Government's approach to visa policy for students and scholars can have an extremely negative impact that restricts mobility into the country. This policy is set by politicians in Washington, DC, with the U.S. Congress and President ultimately holding the power to set or revise national policy on visas and immigration.

State Funding Constraints and Political Pressures

Several participants shared experiences and reflections connected to the state in which they were situated, which had a local and direct impact on the institution politically and financially. Lucia said bluntly the state's politics can have a varied and direct impact on the institution's work, sharing:

I suppose that would depend on where the land-grant institution is, because I think situations are very different between red states and blue states in terms of how land-grant institutions can approach internationalization.

Lucia signaled that politics at the state level can tremendously impact the institution in that state. Some participants who worked in states that voted for President Trump, a group I broadly refer to as *red states* in this discussion, affirmed this perspective. Of note, some participants from red states had positive things to say about the support of their state governments, so I will reiterate this was not a universally negative trend. However, I provide revealing excerpts from two different participants. In the interest of protecting the anonymity of the participants, I will remove the identifying pseudonyms for these excerpts. This first participant was so concerned about how they talked about international work that they demonstrated fear of retaliation, sharing:

I feel like I have to watch my back all the time. I have to watch what I say all the time. I never really had to worry about what I said [in a prior position in a different state]. But here I have to kind of watch what I say, when I say it, who do I say to? Because we are a public university, and we have a close relationship obviously with the state. A lot of our funding comes from the state. They still very much have a very strong hold on us, the legislature here. And so, you have to be careful what you say.

The participant at this institution was extremely proud of their accomplishments and shared many examples of outstanding achievement. However, they were stifled from sharing the fruitful outcomes of their labor in some spaces because their institution was in a state that might be critical of international work, even with the positive outcomes. A different participant echoed that sentiment, stating:

But international agendas here . . . you are treading a bit of a fine line. For example, the [international project] that I talked about, we've been very, very careful about how we've pushed that out into the news media, right? Because you would think everybody would be very proud of the university for [the international project]. You'd think, oh, that's a good thing. Right? But no, to some people, it's not a good thing. So, we've been very careful about publicizing that here. And I think if we were in a blue state, we probably wouldn't think twice. We'd just publicize it, right? But we're not, so we've been careful.

This dynamic of being successful but not being able to talk about it or publish a story in the campus newspaper was a source of significant frustration for these two participants. For one of

them, this frustration led them to consider leaving the stifling environment and consider new professional opportunities.

Yet another participant described relatively new rules imposed by the state government designed to monitor the international activity of their institution and office. The participant explained:

All of a sudden, it was a new practice for us that we were asked to report to the state on any sort of relationships that we had in a number of locations. And those locations were unique to certain countries where there is an ongoing conflict or some sort of anti-American sentiments. So, it's strictly political. One of those big countries is obviously China.

The state government's oversight caught me by surprise, as this was a practice unfamiliar to me. These actions conveyed a sense of threat and oversight that was uncomfortable for this participant and certainly led the SIO to avoid any possibility of activity that might generate unwanted scrutiny from the state government.

All these excerpts shared a related pattern, which also appeared in other conversations. In several cases, the institution was almost viewed as an extension of the state government. State government legislators had a significant influence on public higher education institutions. This entrenched dynamic in some places minimized public communication on international activities to avoid the potential for backlash, critique, and other negative consequences.

One of the biggest levers of power state governments wielded over higher education institutions was the power of funding. Several participants talked about challenges regarding state funding and support for higher education. Cuts to higher education were well documented, and these funding challenges had a downstream impact that affected the international office. One participant said:

For me, financially, it was [a lot of money] that was taken away from me, which I was saving and building up because I wanted to do other things, and now I can't do them. But

the issue is . . . the obvious issue of less and less money from the state legislature, we are being pushed to take more students. So, the legislature and university kind of signed a compact agreement where we will be taking more students, and they will pay us for each student. And then, you know, we will expand. This year, there is a huge structural deficit. It's not stable situation. So, the state didn't give us all the money. And the state took cuts. And we still need to take students, even though we are not getting money.

In this instance, the funding realities at Santiago's institution put pressure on the institution. The pressure generated two challenging outcomes for Santiago. First, the state funding reductions led to a need to raise revenue and increasing international student enrollment became a top priority. Second, this circumstance led to a substantial budget cut to the SIO's office. They expected to use that revenue toward another priority, but institutional leadership had to take it back.

In conclusion, one of my research questions for this study asked how external forces (e.g., geopolitical conflict, global pandemics) influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies. At the global level, active conflict (e.g., in Gaza and Ukraine) geopolitical conflict with countries (e.g., China and Russia) and the potential for expanded conflict all have a chilling effect on internationalization. At the national level, policies are also impacting the work of SIOs, with expectations the Trump Administration will only exacerbate the challenges. Reflections on challenges at the state level are one of the more revealing findings of this qualitative research study. The challenges of higher education funding are not new, so comments on this dynamic were anticipated. However, my professional journey has been primarily situated in a state context that celebrates global engagement, especially at the higher education institution where I have worked.

The concerns about these external ecosystems were strong and present. However, I also detected that participants were resigned to the reality the SIO could not change these circumstances. SIOs cannot bring peace to war-torn areas, fix the United States–China relationship, adjust federal policy, or encourage a state government to celebrate global

engagement. For these reasons, although the external issues were present, no one offered specific solutions to addressing this milieu of external realities. Instead, participants invested more energy in taking action to address the circumstances on their campus as described in the previous section.

SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints

This qualitative research study explored how SIOs at land-grant institutions formulate and implement internationalization strategies in the face of internal pressure and competing stakeholder interests on their campuses. A second research question for this study focused on external global, national, or local impediments to internationalization. Although interviews focused on challenges confronted by each participant, each interview included success stories from the participants. I also concluded the interviews by asking participants for recommendations they would give to another SIO starting a new position at a different land-grant institution to help them succeed.

These recommendations and examples of success provided the data for this fifth and final finding on advancing internationalization through pragmatic action. This theme provides insight into how SIOs *successfully* advance internationalization while confronting the challenges outlined earlier. The primary subthemes from this data include (a) selecting internationalization priorities that fit institutional realities, (b) building institutional alliances and partnerships, (c) raising revenue for autonomy and success, and (d) cultivating resilience and managing expectations.

Selecting Internationalization Priorities That Fit Institutional Realities

Participants discussed the approaches they used to establish internationalization priorities, covered in the second finding in this chapter. Participants reflected on various approaches,

including centering the institution's priorities, formal strategic planning, assigned priorities, inherited priorities, and opportunism typically driven by revenue. One underlying recommendation from participants is that SIOs should select an approach to planning that matches the context and expectations within their institutional setting.

As addressed earlier, participants shared nuanced views on their preferred planning approaches. Lucia, for example, talked in depth about the importance of placing the institution's plan at the center of their work. Lucia eschewed creating a distinct internationalization plan and argued that following institutional priorities was sufficient, saying:

We're not here to do something different from what the university is doing. We're not running our own fiefdoms here. I'm sorry. We're here because there's a university here. We have faculty, we have students. The university has strategies and priorities. The university has outcomes it wishes to get.

Lucia said the underlying priority of internationalization was simply to help the institution achieve its goals. As a result, Lucia did not develop a distinct internationalization plan. Rather, the institution was the primary entity to focus on and the role of the SIO was to advance the institution's goals.

Jericho took a broader approach to this topic, arguing international activities were legitimate activities that support the state's goals. Jericho commented:

The community engagement promise of the land grant is that you're promising to deliver value for your state. And so, in a way you could say that's bad for international stuff. But it's not. It's really good because how do you deliver value for your state? You deliver it by making sure that the state's prepared to compete in a global world. And that's the reality of it. You know? So, I think it's kind of a no-brainer that land-grant universities have that as a core. They have their international identity.

Jericho's views aligned with Lucia's, arguing internationalization should support broader goals. However, rather than the center of the institution, Jericho argued that internationalization can contribute to a state's economic goals of competing successfully and developing an international

identity. Together, Jericho and Lucia recommended SIOs establish internationalization goals that advance the goals of the state and institution in which they operate.

Kobe made further recommendations, especially for SIOs new in their role. Kobe suggested it was important to invest time to understand these external goals. Kobe's comment suggested, in this context, the president and provost had ideas on what they wanted to accomplish, but it was up to Kobe to figure out how to execute their vision. Kobe said:

I reported to the provost and the provost reported to the president. So, through that structure, I interacted with the provost and the president very frequently. Technically weekly or biweekly, or if not that often, whenever there was a need. I had a lot of support in what I was trying to do. And I took time to understand what the vision was. And my goal there, having a supportive president and a very supportive provost, was to figure out how to do it because they, they didn't know. I knew what the outcome was supposed to be.

Altogether, Lucia, Jericho, and Kobe viewed internationalization as an approach, or a tool, to accomplishing other goals of the state, the institution, or institutional leaders. They believed planning for internationalization should be more about executing other plans than advancing their own distinct agenda.

Their views stood in contrast to others. Jai, for example, strongly believed in the value of creating a formal strategic plan. Jai successfully used that process and the subsequent internationalization written plan to clearly and successfully advance an internationalization agenda for the campus. Jai shared:

Well, the first thing is the strategic plan. You have to have that. I would say that was the first thing. That's probably what established the respect in the first place . . . I would say the strategic plan was the foundation to this. It has to be the foundation to this, because that really, that made the provost and the deans realize that, okay, you know what? Change is coming here. We've never seen anything like this.

Jai was the biggest advocate of creating a strategic internationalization plan. For Jai, internationalization was a comparatively new set of initiatives on their campus, and campus

leadership was eager to provide support and visibility to these new efforts. On that campus, the planning document helped generate visibility, create a formal rationale to provide resources and galvanize new action in their context. In Jai's story, the work they advanced also advanced institutional priorities. Jai argued formal planning practices and documents are a tremendous asset to establishing priorities in higher education.

Finally, several participants spoke of the importance of opportunism and taking advantage of emerging opportunities in lieu of planning. Some of the most significant achievements for the participants were not imagined through planning exercises or embedded in institutional goals. Rather, an opportunity emerged, and the SIO pursued it. Salvador spoke of a preference for SIOs to maintain a balanced approach to strategic planning and opportunism, saying:

A final recommendation is to keep an open mind and be on the lookout for opportunities. I would say that my style is a mix of strategy versus opportunism. I look for opportunities and I respond to them when they arise. But I also got a long-term strategy in place.

There was no single, universally accepted approach to planning on their campuses. The participants in this study all took different approaches, perhaps suggesting SIOs engage in a clear-eyed approach to goal setting. In doing so, SIOs should be fully aware of their institutional context and center those realities as they aim to establish internationalization priorities.

Building Institutional Alliances and Partnerships

As the third finding outlines in detail, the participants all experienced campus-based impediments to advancing their work. The impediments came from many sources, including campus histories, leadership, systems, and apathy toward global engagement from faculty and staff. All participants suggested one remedy to this problem is to build strong, active, and effective alliances across the campus. Campus networks were described as key pathways to

advance internationalization, protection from or solutions to impediments, and an all-around asset for the SIO. This theme was so prevalent across the participants that I view this prioritization of building campus networks as a call to action from the participants. Florence described the value and importance of building campus networks, saying:

I think the advice I would give is, make sure that you and your unit have a clearly defined purpose, which is known to everybody. People don't pay attention to international programs or any of these side units, you know, the support service units. They think, oh when we need them, we'll go and tell them. I think tooting your own horn a little bit, and letting people know what value you add through the ways that I described before, you know? Connect with the deans. Connect with the faculty senate. Engage faculty members to go abroad with you, so that they know the international office is really playing a role in all these different things. I think being known would be winning half the battle and the most important part of the battle.

Florence emphasized the importance of being known. Once those connections are established, the SIO should communicate the array of responsibilities and possibilities for how the SIO and international office could support the international interests of faculty and campus administrators.

All participants referenced the importance of effectively working across the campus with faculty, staff, and various constituencies. Several participants talked about some of the specific tactics they used while trying to build alliances across the campus. This was so important to Zaria that they made it a focal point of their work. Zaria recalled:

I probably spend 80% of my time outside of the international office and with other colleges. Because structurally I have no authority. It's all . . . it's all soft power [laugh]. It's all soft persuasion and trust. Building trust . . . So I've been to a lot of meetings that might tangential, like I'll say, oh, I'll volunteer to be part of this meeting so that I will meet different associate deans and different heads of departments. But I'll also spend a lot of time just inviting them over, or coming over to them, and talking about their international plans. Some of them say you're the first person who's ever asked and we don't know what our plans are. I said, well, that's honest. I told our new provost, we can't really be effective to do anything unless it's collaborative.

Zaria talked about attending meetings upon meetings, participating in marginally relevant committees, and being available to the campus to talk about international initiatives. Zaria shared an additional story of a recent performance evaluation when the provost noticed this extra investment of time in campus engagement and viewed it positively.

I was surprised to hear Zaria invested as much as 80% of their time in this alliance building work. This significant amount signaled the importance of this task. Of note, both Lucia and Kingston also independently shared they invested as much as 80% of their time in this work. When discussing how they viewed the importance of campus engagement and how this benefited the international office, Kingston shared:

We work with financial aid so that we can send out a letter to every Pell eligible student to get them information about applying for a Gilman scholarship. That was a huge hurdle. They wouldn't share that information . . . , well, they still won't share that information with us. But what they will do is send out a message for us to those students, and then the students can come to us. But it's those sort of campus relationships. I feel like 80% of my job sometimes is just maintaining campus relationships . . . But it is having a public face and, and the team has said that they think it is really important to have someone at a senior leadership level in order to have global injected into the conversation and to know where we need to be present. And usually we are the ones going out and generating those conversations.

Kingston shared a specific story about how communications regarding access to the Gilman scholarship were ineffective, creating barriers to Pell-eligible students. Although the problem has not been fully resolved, communications have improved, enabling more students to learn about the Gilman scholarship opportunity. Kingston credited the time invested in building campus relationships and having a public face in the campus ecosystem as helping address this problem and get resources to students.

Returning to tactics, in addition to meetings, some participants took advantage of the power to convene people on international topics. Some used this tool to create regular and sustained conversations on campus. A common tactic is forming a campus-wide advisory

committee of staff and faculty appointed by leadership to meet periodically throughout the year.

Jericho described their approach, saying:

In terms of faculty engagement there's a lot of different ways that we engage faculty. So, part of it is through our International Advisory Council, which deans appoint faculty members to, primarily, sometimes professional staff are on that council too. We get a lot of input from them. We have a lot of discussions. Help colleges think strategically about their international engagements of all sorts.

Jericho's approach to building a campus organization was typical. The composition of the group, along with the decision-making authority of the body and the frequency of meeting times, changed from campus to campus. However, this convening authority was a regular tool available to the SIO.

I was particularly drawn to Vienna's recommendations on ways to engage faculty to get them more involved in international opportunities. Vienna encouraged centering fame, fortune, and fun as a campus engagement strategy. Vienna noted:

You can't do this work alone . . . you really do have to make colleagues across the campus. You have to start having lunches with deans. Give awards. I did a whole presentation one time on the things that motivate faculty. It's fame, fortune, and fun. So come up with awards that have nothing attached to them but the title. Have a competition where they nominate each other and then you put their face on the website. Like there's a million ways to do fame. They read the newsletter and say, "How come my colleague is in that? I should be there." You know? Well, tell me what you do. We'll put you in next time. And then fortune. If you can share any kind of a grant, if you can give a hundred dollars stipend for showing up on a panel. And fun is just, you know, invite 'em to the parties. Take 'em abroad. And there's a lot of ways to do that. And I like that work. I mean, I think it's really great to see what makes people tick. And people don't forget that stuff. They were noticed, they were acknowledged, they were thanked publicly. It's huge. I think that's key.

Vienna summarized an intentional and clear strategy to engage with faculty. Most importantly, Vienna outlined that faculty have agency in determining their priorities, and they have choices in advancing their research, scholarship, and teaching. If an SIO wanted more faculty to be globally engaged, it was incumbent on the SIO to create an incentive framework

aligning with faculty interests. If faculty were not intrinsically interested, there was no reason to anticipate their participation. However, this framework of fame, fun, and fortune provided a roadmap for the SIO.

Sofia understood the dynamic around fortune well, sharing vivid imagery on what mattered most to faculty. Sofia recounted, “One person taught me that faculty are like cats, they follow the food. So, offer ‘em money, you know. If you want ‘em to do things, you gotta offer ‘em some money.” Sofia’s grants were modest travel awards that enabled faculty to advance research or partnerships abroad, encourage new faculty-led study abroad programs, or expand virtual exchange and other academic initiatives to new faculty. Funding was described as a powerful way to attract faculty attention and encourage greater interest in and participation in internationalization initiatives.

Regarding fame, Vienna’s earlier comments around newsletter articles aligned with comments made by others on award programs, highlighting faculty work in new websites that capture the global footprint of an institution, and offering special opportunities to faculty. Participants also talked about examples of bringing fun to faculty through invitations to special events and gatherings on campus. Some SIOs strategically used the privilege of international travel, inviting targeted faculty or administrators to participate in international travel to gain their support and favor. One participant talked about inviting colleagues who did not typically travel, like police officers and mental health professionals. These choices were strategic to advance a specific collaborative opportunity. Vienna’s framework of fame, fortune, and fun was a helpful device that encouraged SIOs to think about how their office could provide tangible benefits to campus colleagues and, hopefully, invite these colleagues to support global engagement in the future.

I conclude this section with comments from Santiago, for whom this work was a professional imperative. Santiago described:

I make regular rounds and talk to people, and I just constantly remind people about our work. Talking with the Office of Research is very important. And part of the issue here is that internationalization is not only about student mobility. It's not only about sending students abroad. In our case, I believe a lot of times when the partners come, they want research. They want research collaboration and then the mobility will come. We also cosponsor events. We provide funding to campus partners for their priorities. Then our office is acknowledged throughout the whole year. We are everywhere. You have to be everywhere all the time. Be an ambassador.

The symbolism of acting as an *ambassador* resonated with me, partly because the work of a political ambassador is situated in a global context. For Santiago, this was all-encompassing work, including outreach to the research office and even sponsorship of another organization on campus, all to stay in the public eye on that campus. Santiago emphasized the constant need to build campus partnerships to advance internationalization.

Raising Revenue for Autonomy and Success

Academic capitalism was one of the theoretical frameworks of this study. Participants often spoke about the impact of academic capitalism and how it shaped the specific responsibilities of the SIO, drove the process of prioritizing activities, and created campus-based and external impediments. However, a tension became apparent as generating revenue was also an expectation that several participants shared, especially when growing or sustaining the work of the international office. Lucia shared a helpful introduction to the theme, highlighting how their financial model demanded the international office generate revenue. Lucia said:

I have to generate revenue for my division because, I'd say we're probably something like, in rough numbers, 60% fee funded and 40% centrally funded as a unit . . . So we do some SEVIS fees, we have some OPT fees, we charge fees for H-1Bs and J scholars. So, things of that nature. But the bulk of the revenue comes in education abroad . . . So, yes, we are definitely expected to produce revenue for ourselves.

Lucia noted they collect fees from international students, scholars, and students studying abroad. This approach was common among the participants, which helped support the division's staffing and operational costs.

Jericho affirmed this approach at their institution and suggested it is standard practice for international offices. Jericho also introduced other revenue-generating initiatives that they have pursued at their campus. Jericho explained:

So how do we get the revenue? Same way as everybody does, from fees . . . So we charge international students fees and scholars fees and all the rest of it. We charge education abroad fees. We capture one credit of tuition which is an interesting model for education abroad, which works actually quite well. And that one credit, if you're interested, is for an orientation program. Basically, orientation and reflection curriculum that gets overlaid on what the actual program is about. We can generate other revenues. We have been doing things like summer programs for partner universities, semester long programs for partner universities. We've done summer camps in the past for high school students from overseas. What else have we done? Well, things like that. And then we've run grants.

Grant projects, hosting visiting groups for short-term educational experiences, and generating revenue through the institution's tuition model are all examples of the SIO acting entrepreneurially to generate revenue for their office.

Kobe shared another example of how they hoped to generate fees for their international office from services rendered throughout the institution. Kobe described:

For example, in one of the departments, they hired a lot of foreign PhD students, and they requested some support in terms of language support for them. Before, when they were getting trained to teach and assist with the classes, we didn't have that function. That led to the idea that we should look at the functions and identify where the needs are, so that we can become this department. Then those services would be available on a pay-as-you-play basis. So that we can recover some money and get it, beyond being just a support function for the university. It's just like the IT department. When they come and set up your phone, they charge you \$10 or whatever minor fee that might be. We wanted to go into this model, and that is the model that the university was supportive of, and that's what several departments were utilizing. There were some fees attached, so that you can generate some revenue for yourself.

Kobe's idea stood out for me, comparing the work of the international office to the fee-funded IT department at their institution. Subsequently, this led me to think of other units in higher education that operate as auxiliary units, generating revenue to cover their costs. Parking, the food court, dining facilities, and the bookstore are examples of small enterprises within higher education. Kobe's specific comment, alongside all the other participants demonstrating how they were required to generate revenue, led me to speculate if international offices were evolving into an auxiliary structure, a topic for further discussion in Chapter 5.

Kobe, Jericho, and Lucia all signaled the importance of generating revenue. Paris put this into practice with a story about how they wanted to create a new staff position in the international division. They tried to ask institutional leadership to support the position and provide funding. Unfortunately, they received a negative response to both requests. Here is how Paris was eventually able to fund and get the new position. Paris shared:

I asked for 4 years, I asked for the [new] position . . . I needed someone from the faculty to keep me from going over the ledge all the time, because I was just stepping on landmines with our faculty right and left. And so, I kept asking. Kept asking. Then finally I cobbled together the money to do a pilot, because universities always go for pilots, 'cause it doesn't seem like it's permanent. Then I hired a faculty member and paid half of the salary, and he was [the new position]. And then I was able to find the money to make it permanent. So, then I had to just get the approval for the AVP. So once the provost wasn't paying for it anymore, then they reluctantly agreed to the position.

Paris pulled together the money and funded the position internally. The institutional leadership that was initially reluctant to see the position exist ultimately acquiesced when they realized they did not need to provide funding for the role. Funding to pilot and sustain these types of activities came from the revenue-generating opportunities discussed earlier or from redirecting vacancies and making other internal strategic budgeting choices. The key point Paris shared was it was important for SIOs to try to generate their own revenue in order to make independent choices regarding their work.

Paris made a second important recommendation to implement new ideas and invest in pilot projects. With modest funds, the SIO can trial an idea and then request more substantial funds once a tested concept proves successful. This strategy of incremental growth, using internal funds, and then pivoting to more substantial revenue from institutional funds is an approach for other SIOs to consider.

This section focused on the need for the SIO to generate revenue for their office but not for the institution. Returning to Paris, they learned they would be judged on their ability to help the dean generate revenue. They commented:

I think there's an expectation that, as a 'service unit' in our budget model, I'm expected to help the colleges figure out how to generate revenue. Because what I keep hearing from the provost is, if the deans tell me they think what you're doing is valuable, then that is where you're gonna derive your success from. So, I spend a lot of time now thinking about how to get the deans to say what we're doing is of value.

Paris shared their success was, in part, determined by deans' satisfaction, informed by their revenue motivations. In this context, Paris described a clear motivation to help deans achieve their financial goals to be viewed as successful.

Overall, despite the challenges and tensions, the participants seemed either comfortable with or resigned to the reality of academic capitalism as a feature of their work. Generating revenue, often from fees charged to international students and study abroad students, was an important tool to generate revenue, which gave the SIO greater fiscal autonomy to invest resources to successfully advance internationalization priorities.

However, Jai was one participant who just did not believe in this approach. I asked Jai if fees were a part of their system, and Jai said:

Yeah, we don't charge them a fee because I, I just don't, I don't believe in that. I never have. We don't charge them a fee. Some institutions charge this hefty . . . for example, I think [another university] charges \$2,500 to international students a semester, a fee, an administrative fee, a semester. Get this Chad, a semester! That sounds illegal!! And that's

what they do at [that university]. So international students have to pay a \$5,000 fee annually at [that university]. And that fee is then turned around to support the global office. Support salaries and things like that in the global office. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. Just unbelievable. And domestic students don't have to do it.

Jai advocated for keeping the cost to students as low as possible and was simultaneously taken aback by the proliferation of fees happening at other higher education institutions. However, Jai was the only participant who made this strong statement of advocacy about cost controls for either international students or students participating in study abroad. Although other participants may have shared Jai's views, they revealed generating revenue was also an important tool available to the SIO to advance internationalization priorities.

The data from this study, informed through the theoretical framework of academic capitalism, highlight the normalization of revenue generation, especially when leading international offices. Generating revenue was perceived as a distinct function of the role of the SIO from these participants. In their situations, they were expected to raise revenue for their office and, in some cases, were strongly encouraged to help colleges raise revenue. As participants discussed establishing and implementing their own internationalization priorities, the ability to draw from their own financial resources was seen as a recommendation for others to emulate. However, other participants were critical of this approach. Academic capitalism was a theoretical framework for this study, and these comments regarding the revenue-generating obligations, opportunities, and critiques highlight the ongoing importance of this topic in higher education broadly and to SIOs specifically.

Cultivating Resilience and Managing Expectations

As outlined in several of the themes in this chapter, participants regularly discussed impediments or challenges to their work, driven by pervasive frustrations emanating from various sources. For some participants, this was a source of constant aggravation. However,

some participants exhibited an ability to set their frustrations and disappointments aside. To conclude this theme on strategies and practices to advance internationalization, participants offered several recommendations on cultivating resilience and managing expectations for the inevitable disappointments that SIOs face.

I start with an excerpt from a participant whom I will not identify to maintain anonymity. In this situation, the provost made a decision that had a profoundly negative impact on the participant. They described their frustration and eventual acceptance in the following dramatic way, sharing:

I'll tell you candidly, I almost quit when the provost told me that. I was like, you are f'ing kidding! Basically. Like, you cannot do this to me. This is ridiculous, you know? Anyway, I fought and fought and, and I actually thought I was gonna get fired over this. So, I decided I didn't want to get fired, you know? That probably wouldn't be the best thing to do for the agenda that we have set up. It might have been the best thing to do for my mental health, but it wouldn't have been the best thing to do for what we were doing. I calmed down and just decided to keep going and said we can just work around it. Like this is a new reality. Okay, fine. It's not one I would've chosen. But it's not the end of the world.

This episode was dramatic and obviously painful for the participant. It involved a series of choices that could have ended their employment at this institution. However, after reflection, they accepted the situation, understanding this was not their preference but would be the reality moving forward. They moved forward in doing their job to the best of their ability.

Although this participant shared a raw example of frustration, all the interviews featured some form of frustration during our discussion. At times, the frustrations were caused by a lack of support from leadership, confronting uncooperative deans, a resource challenge, an interpersonal difference of opinion or conflict, or a frustrating reorganization. Sofia shared this example of a reorganization that eventually moved the international student recruiting team to the admission team, explaining:

When domestic enrollment showed potential signs of declining, [a group of us] said, hey, we can offset this potential loss by focusing on an area that the university has never focused on. So, the provost listened, gave us money, and we got to work. Then, yeah, the [enrollment management leader] wanted more . . . I don't know what's the best word to use, but [that person] wanted it all together. And so I, I didn't fight it . . . the provost wanted it. It wasn't worth fighting, so I just let it happen.

Sofia and Jericho each described a challenging episode where senior leadership at their institution chose to give preference and greater authority to another person on campus over the SIO and international office. However, both Sofia and Jericho made intentional choices to move beyond their frustration and accept the reality of the choices made by leadership.

The third theme on campus-based impediments shared several examples where the participants experienced challenges across the campus. The word *agnostic* and its synonyms were invoked during a handful of the interviews, perhaps as a coping mechanism from frustrated participants. The excerpts earlier revealed SIOs turn to coping mechanisms for dealing with frustration, recommending resilience, and that SIOs accepted difficult decisions and moved forward. Other participants shared perspectives on how to deal with difficult situations. Another participant reflected:

The president's been on campus with us for [a number of] years . . . I like the president very much. Their global acumen sucks. And that is really frustrating for me. And my provost has been on campus for [a number of] years and is very challenging to deal with for a whole other set of issues . . . I'm trying to work around them. We are having success in doing that, but in all honesty, those two leaders are the mainstay of my discontent.

Here, the unidentified participant, who was clearly unhappy with campus leadership, recommended acknowledging the situation and working around the impediment to the extent possible. Navigating a challenging president and provost must be difficult, but in this instance, the participant was making it work.

Sydney also shared a recommendation on what to do when working with disinterested campus partners, in this case, deans simply uninterested in global work. Sydney suggested:

So, the thing about [this university] is, it's big enough that right there, is more than enough, right? More than enough. You know? You sometimes come across a college dean for whom international was like pulling teeth. You could supply them the rationale. You could explain to them why they need to be more involved from your perspective. You could encourage and support them. You could remind them that you have faculty travel grants. You could do that encouraging stuff. But then naturally, for my staff, for those deans, it'd be like, okay, listen, we banged our head on that wall plenty. We are gonna be cordial, we're gonna be polite. We'll continue to work with them. But actually, this dean over here deserves our attention.

Sydney described another frustrating circumstance. In this instance, the frustrations emanated from a lack of engagement in pursuing activities of interest. In these instances, the impediment is less overtly problematic and not driven by influential individuals. Instead, Sydney and the staff were disappointed by the lack of interest or a missed opportunity from one dean. However, they intentionally focused their attention where the enthusiasm was greater, and collaboration seemed more fruitful.

Vienna was also familiar with navigating people on campus and had developed several responses to address this situation. Sometimes, Vienna walked around problematic deans. At other times, they maintained an optimistic lens, imagining that disinterested campus partners might turn around and become more engaged in the future. Vienna noted:

I think if it was other deans, I just walked around them. You know, if I invited them to several initiatives, for example, and just got either hell no, or, not now, that was fine. I mean, that is the beauty of [this] school. I don't need everybody to like me at the same time. And I don't mean like me personally, I mean like the field. I just need a handful. And then, when I go back for those annual meetings with each dean, I could show on a spreadsheet how many of their faculty we supported. Why is that? It's because you can't force people at a university. Particularly faculty and senior staff. They can pick their priorities, 'cause we have too many. But you can always circle back. I had plenty of people that I've ruffled feathers over the years and come back a year later and invited them again. And I think they're a little surprised. But yeah, I think it's a lot of patience and trust. I think people take things so personally, it's like, well, he never comes to my events. So what! Maybe he will next year?

I was drawn to Vienna's pragmatic approach. Vienna understood their institution was a large and complex organization, with several competing priorities and opportunities at the institutional

level. At the college and faculty level, there was a fair amount of agency and autonomy, allowing individuals at that campus the permission to be as involved in internationalization activities as they wished. Where there was a lack of interest, Vienna and Sydney also recommend setting frustrations for disengagement aside. Instead, they recommend working with a coalition of the enthused and advancing internationalization with those most interested in the work.

I conclude this chapter with an excerpt from Lucia. Lucia touched on many of the recommendations mentioned throughout this chapter, commenting:

I think [pause] maybe the one piece of advice I would give to SIOs is to think of themselves as an agent of their institution. . . . I think what I'm trying to say is, you know, a lot of us get into this role because we believe in the work of international education, right? And that we want the work to be advanced in certain ways. But that may not always be possible at public institutions, which have a lot of different pressures on them. I think the question you should be willing to ask yourself, as an SIO in a land-grant public institution in the United States, is how can I meet some of my objectives? And when am I willing to say . . . save this is for another day. Because my institution will only let me do certain things. And not be disappointed, dejected, soured by the fact that not everyone shares your idealism. Temper your idealism with some pragmatism.

Lucia captured the realities and challenges of being a disempowered employee of a higher education institution, specifically a land-grant institution with legacy responsibilities to the state and specific obligations to the institution itself. Lucia further acknowledged that SIO preferences to advance specific internationalization objectives may be incompatible with contextual realities. When that happened, rather than be dejected, Lucia offered a recommendation that SIOs turn to *pragmatism* when leading internationalization. This excerpt epitomized a theme that was present throughout this chapter. The role of the SIO has been challenging and complex, sometimes hindered by circumstances on campus and from the state, national, and global levels. Understanding these challenges, recalibrating expectations accordingly, and moving forward in a spirit of pragmatism can be a helpful mindset for the SIO.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings from this qualitative study, which explored how SIOs at land-grant institutions develop and advance internationalization strategies in the face of internal and external challenges. I shared data from this study that explored the multifaceted realities of SIOs. The five themes introduced in this chapter include:

- The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific
- Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches
- SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization
- SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels
- SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints

Through the lenses of academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle, the findings reveal how SIOs must balance competing stakeholder priorities, limited resources, and rapidly shifting global conditions while still striving to articulate and advance coherent, mission-driven internationalization strategies. The five emergent themes presented in this chapter offer a nuanced picture of both the structural constraints, shifting priorities, and inconsistent agency that characterize the work of SIOs within the land-grant context.

Despite the many institutional and external barriers SIOs face, all participants affirmed their clear commitment to advancing meaningful international engagement and to their perceptions on the possibilities presented by internationalization in higher education. Their reflections suggest, although internationalization efforts face severe constraints, they are also marked by innovation and resilience. Participants also shared, when institutional commitment and effective leadership is present, SIOs can advance effective internationalization initiatives. The insights shared by the participants underscore the value of pragmatic, context-sensitive

approaches to internationalization that align with institutional priorities while remaining responsive to global, national, and local change events. These findings provide a critical foundation for further discussion.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Internationalization leadership has been increasingly shaped by institutional complexity and external volatility, making it important to understand how senior leaders navigate these challenges. This qualitative research study was designed and conducted to gain a deeper understanding of higher education leadership from the perspective of those who lead the internationalization of higher education. This study focused on senior international officers (SIOs) at land-grant institutions in the United States. I explored how individuals in these positions formulated and implemented internationalization strategies at their campuses while navigating diverse stakeholder interests and competing priorities at their institution. I also asked participants about the impact of ever-evolving global, national, and local contexts on their work. The two research questions for this qualitative research study were as follows:

- How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?
- How do external forces, such as geopolitical conflict and global pandemics, influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies?

I conducted 15 semistructured interviews with participants between July and September 2024. All interviews were conducted before the election of President Trump later that year. Each participant served as an SIO at a land-grant institution in the United States for at least 2 years. At the time of the interview, all participants were either in their SIO roles or had recently left their positions. The open-ended nature of the discussions led to a range of stories and reflections. Participants discussed their responsibilities, priorities, and accomplishments. They discussed

challenges faced from within their institutions. The participants also shared challenges rooted in circumstances and policies at the state, national, and global levels. Each discussion concluded with three common questions: (a) What was the biggest challenge to leading internationalization? (b) What recommendation can you share for a new SIO in a similar role? and (c) What gives you hope for the future of internationalization?

The following section presents a discussion on each of the five findings introduced in Chapter 4 in tandem with the literature introduced in Chapter 2. I then provide a separate section discussing the findings through the prisms of the study's two theoretical frameworks, academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle. In this section, I also discuss the contemporary value of these legacy frameworks, recommend the development of new frameworks, and introduce Dynamic Internationalization Leadership as a new contribution to scholarship and starting point for further discussion. Next, I provide a summary of the study, offering brief answers to the study's two research questions. The chapter continues with a discussion of this study's contribution to literature and professional practice. I also offer recommendations for future research, including a call for scholars to continuously refresh and reimagine the definitions of internationalization. After that, I share reflections on the practical implications of this study in the context of the 1st year of President Trump's second term as President of the United States. I conclude this chapter with a personal reflection on my dissertation journey.

Discussion of Literature and the Findings

Drawing from discussions with the 15 participants, I identified five distinct yet interrelated themes that offer insight into the complexity of the SIO role today. As introduced in Chapter 2, the five themes from this study are:

- The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific

- Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches
- SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization
- SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels
- SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints

Please refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed presentation of the data and these findings. The next section provides a brief overview of each finding and connections to literature introduced in Chapter 2.

The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific

The first theme, *The SIO Role is Inconsistently Defined and Context Specific*, highlights the wide-ranging functional areas that participants described as the SIO. No two participants shared the same list of responsibilities, illustrating the variety across the participants' professional responsibilities in this study. It was typical for participants to be responsible for international student and scholar services, education abroad, and international partnerships. However, participants also were responsible for diverse or special duties, such as international student recruiting, academic initiatives, research and other faculty interests, intensive English programs, alumni engagement and fundraising. Some participants were responsible for special projects such as development of a branch campus or advancing trade promotion in their state. Participants shared their role and authority as institutional leaders were limited on their campus, notably in the academic, research, and fundraising domains, where other campus leaders had primary responsibilities for those activities. Each participant's specific areas of oversight were often established previously through historic arrangements based on institutional context, adjusted based on preferences of campus senior leadership, or were being redesigned to pursue some future aspiration often aligned with revenue generation.

As described in the literature, the SIO often serves as the head of an international office or division, reporting to senior leadership and tasked with shaping and implementing internationalization priorities (Helms et al., 2017; Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Kwai, 2017; Nolan, 2018; Soler et al., 2022). However, no universally accepted definition of the role exists, and its scope can range from managing a one-person office to leading large, multiteam divisions (Di Maria, 2019b; Reinig, 2016). This variability means that institutional mission, history, size, and leadership culture profoundly shape how the SIO role is understood and actualized within each specific context.

The literature on SIO responsibilities further illustrates the breadth of the position. Di Maria (Di Maria, 2019a) outlined 10 major functional areas, ranging from administration, partnerships, and curriculum integration to education abroad, global operations, enrollment management, research facilitation, and compliance. No single SIO role encompasses all these areas equally. Institutional size, governance structures, and leadership vision are some of the ingredients that determine the specific array of functions assigned to any one SIO. This matters, as assumptions about what an SIO should be able to accomplish may not match the realities of their position. As circumstances change, SIO responsibilities can also change, further eroding a stable and consistent view of the role of an SIO at an institution.

As detailed in Chapter 4, participant excerpts support this observation. For example, there was meaningful variation in the level of authority, autonomy, and visibility that SIOs enjoy. Some participants were satisfied with their influence at their institution. Others described their roles as less influential than they might prefer, with limited authority, minimal budgetary discretion, and constrained access to senior leadership. Kingston regretted being disinvited from important strategic planning and decision-making spaces, saying, “I definitely miss being on the

Council of Deans.” Kingston’s views were shared by other participants who described how their positional authority or access to senior leadership was in retreat at their institution.

In practice, the absence of a standard or consistent set of responsibilities can have both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, flexibility allows institutions to tailor the SIO role to fit the unique needs, priorities, and resource structures of their institution. On the other hand, an excessive level of flexibility can lead to role ambiguity, making it harder for SIOs to secure the authority, resources, and cross-campus engagement necessary to fulfill their mandate. Bamako and Jericho each shared reflections that illustrate how support for internationalization was waning at their institutions. At Bamako’s institution, a senior leader candidly shared, “We’re not going to put global here, raising hands [up high]. The leader said, it’s down here [bringing hands down low].” Jericho shared an even more threatening reflection, saying, “If the university really decides that international is irrelevant, I could see a scenario, worst case scenario, I could see them firing me.” This raises the question: Is internationalization entering a phase of becoming devalued in higher education? This ambiguity can also hinder professional development pathways, because aspiring SIOs may receive preparation for a role as it exists in one institution, but later find their role ultimately is completely different at another institution.

Ultimately, the inconsistent and context-specific nature of the SIO role, as articulated by participants and discussed in literature, underscores that effective internationalization leadership depends on more than individual capability; it requires institutional clarity about the role’s scope, priorities, and authority. The SIO must be aware of the institution’s authentic view of internationalization. When institutions articulate the SIO’s purpose within their specific context

and align resources accordingly, they create the conditions for the SIO to more successfully lead strategic, sustainable, and mission-aligned internationalization.

This finding demonstrates that the formulation and implementation of internationalization strategies are contingent on how the SIO role is defined and situated within each institution. When the definition of the role varies widely across the field, internationalization leadership at the level of the institution becomes a context-specific process, rather than a standardized administrative practice.

Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches

The second theme, *Internationalization Priorities Are Set Through Varied and Unsystematic Approaches*, summarizes diverse and ambiguous strategies for establishing internationalization priorities among the participants. Several participants described having limited authority in setting their own priorities. Returning to the beginning of Chapter 1, my initial impetus for this study is drawn from personal experience that squarely aligns with this finding. Presidents and provosts sometimes assigned priorities to the participants. In other cases, SIOs inherited messes that demanded immediate attention. Unanticipated issues also emerged that defined a participant's agenda. Several participants expressed skepticism about the utility of formal strategic plans. Instead, SIOs often used the stated goals of the institution as the foundation for their own planning efforts. Other participants were eager to react quickly to fresh opportunities, especially those tied to resource generation for their office or the institution. Only one participant was an enthusiastic fan of their formal internationalization strategic planning process. More participants shared, at best, they found marginal value in the creation of a strategic internationalization plan.

Much of the literature on higher education internationalization emphasizes the value of deliberate, coordinated planning. Planning is viewed as an important step to transform institutional commitment into concrete strategies (Knight, 1994). Hudzik (2011, 2014) similarly framed *comprehensive internationalization* as a process that must be embedded in institutional strategy, supported by measurable goals, and integrated across all functions of the university. The underlying assumption in the literature is that planning yields coherent, sustainable, and effective internationalization.

The findings of this study suggest a different reality. Across the SIO interviews, proactive planning, particularly in the form of multiyear, stand-alone internationalization strategies, was described in negative tones, such as a “red herring” by Vienna. Participants pointed to the instability of leadership priorities, sudden external disruptions, and shifting financial landscapes as reasons why carefully constructed plans rarely survive intact over the longer term. In practice, SIOs described adopting reactive and opportunistic approaches, aligning their work with unanticipated challenges and immediate opportunities rather than following predetermined strategies. This adaptive stance was not framed as a failure of leadership but as a necessary survival strategy in an environment where conditions can change abruptly and where SIO authority to enforce long-term plans is limited.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 provides partial insight into this dynamic. Studies by Childress (2009) and Agnew (2013) each suggested institutional culture and governance structures can undermine coordinated planning. This result might emerge when internationalization is highly decentralized or when faculty, administrative units, and senior leaders hold differing or disconnected priorities. The Mapping Internationalization Study (Soler et al., 2022) found, although many institutions reference internationalization in strategic planning

documents, fewer institutions have supported symbolic statements of support with sufficient resources or by taking concrete steps. My study's findings align with those observations by showing, for some SIOs, eschewing formalized planning altogether is not merely a byproduct of structural barriers, it is a deliberate choice shaped by contextual realities.

The variety of approaches to establishing priorities mirrors the diverse rationales for internationalization identified in Chapter 2. Individual faculty may prioritize collaborative research or curriculum integration (Agnew, 2013; Friesen, 2013), whereas senior administrators emphasize student mobility or global branding (Soler et al., 2022). Without a deliberate process to reconcile these different perspectives, the resulting priorities reflect the loudest voices, the most engaged team members willing and able to force action, or the most accessible funding opportunities, rather than a consensus on what will best advance the institution's mission.

According to the participants in this study, internationalization was rarely framed as a top or independent institutional priority. Instead, internationalization was more often used to support more pressing institutional goals as determined by leadership preferences or external pressures. Lucia was clear on this point when they said, "Why should my plan be any different from the campus' plan? It's my job to link the ideas that I have to things that are in the campus strategic plan." Participants regularly mentioned proudly that their work aligned with institutional goals. Increasing international student enrollment, supporting and enhancing faculty research, and expanding revenue streams were all noted as examples of institutional priorities that predetermined their actions. Several also noted their strategies were shaped around supporting specific presidential priorities, board expectations, or state-driven policy objectives such as workforce development or economic competitiveness. For example, Kobe noted, "We were bringing international students to gain additional funding to make things happen for the in-state

and domestic students,” showing how international effort aligned with state policy interests that favored the in-state students. In this context, international student enrollment growth was valued precisely because it helped meet a state-driven and financially motivated institutional imperative. Finally, participants shared, as institutional priorities changed, internationalization priorities quickly changed as well. Bamako experienced this when curriculum internationalization was replaced by industry partnerships as a priority, leading them to say, “I kind of had to restructure everything.” Internationalization here was viewed as a means of accomplishing the stated institutional objective of the moment.

This finding illustrates that the formulation of internationalization strategies is shaped not by systematic planning processes, but by ad hoc and institution-specific priority-setting practices. As a result, SIOs must tailor their strategy development to the unique political and cultural dynamics of their institutions rather than rely on standardized models.

SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization

The third theme, *SIOs Face Institutional Obstacles to Advancing Internationalization*, addresses the internal challenges that constrain the SIO at their institution. Participants described a recurring gap between institutional rhetoric and actual support for internationalization. In some settings, internationalization was overtly described as either a peripheral or diminishing priority. In other situations, internationalization was viewed as politically sensitive and something to downplay, particularly in states with more conservative political environments. Some participants viewed the SIO role itself as increasingly precarious, noting their authority was being dismantled and they experienced a notable lack of engagement from the president or provost on international matters. Participants also shared decentralized systems and a tendency

for some institutional colleagues at the vice president or dean level to ignore or disregard the SIO led to withering institutional support for global engagement.

The experiences of SIOs in this study suggest a complicated and frustrating reality. Many participants shared the institutional commitment from their senior leadership was inconsistent, lacking, or absent. In some cases, presidents or provosts shared a verbal endorsement of global engagement but then failed to back their words with the requisite funding, staffing, or authority. Other participants described abrupt or disruptive reversals, especially when new leaders joined the campus, ultimately leading to a reprioritization away from internationalization in lieu of other initiatives. As one participant put it, anonymized here due to the sensitivity of this topic, there was often “a gap between the speech and the budget.” For many, this frustration was not a momentary blip but a persistent feature of their position.

These findings highlight that securing leadership commitment is neither straightforward nor permanent. Even when commitment is present, it can be fragile, subject to turnover, budget pressures, or shifting institutional priorities. In some contexts, commitment was described as conditional, emerging only when internationalization promised near-term financial gains or helped solve pressing enrollment or funding problems. Institutional obstacles were not always structural; they were also relational. To address this relationship imperative, several participants described how they spent a significant amount of time and effort cultivating allies at their campus, with three participants independently sharing they spend “80%” of their time building these alliances. For those SIOs, advancing internationalization required sustained political and relational work as much as technical expertise.

Some of these challenges were noted in the Chapter 2 literature review. The importance of securing institutional leadership and the need to secure requisite funding (Di Maria, 2019b,

2021; Lutabingwa, 2019) were noted as important ingredients for success. Other authors provided an overview of role of the SIO (Deardorff & Charles, 2018; Di Maria, 2019b; Merckx & Nolan, 2015), focusing largely on the idealized or aspirational version of what SIOs can or should do. Scholars have also explored campus barriers to internationalization, for example, noting variance between institutional and faculty priorities for internationalization (Calikoglu et al., 2022) or exploring broader challenges to internationalization (Zaman & Mohsin, 2014).

However, comments from participants do not neatly align with scholarship that paints a generally optimistic picture of securing institutional support (Hudzik, 2011; Soler et al., 2022). Instead, the level of frustration expressed by some participants with their campus leadership and personal experience reveals an assumption embedded in literature that support can be secured. The findings of this study challenge that assumption, suggesting gaining a meaningful commitment from leadership for internationalization underestimates the challenges in achieving it.

In practice, institutional commitment is contested, conditional, and transactional, shaped as much by financial imperatives and political realities as the institution's stated mission. Navigating these conditions is not an ancillary element of the SIO role; instead, it is a central feature of the work of sustaining internationalization in the face of fleeting support. This finding suggests that the formulation and implementation of internationalization strategies are often constrained by uneven and flimsy institutional commitments. To move strategies forward, SIOs must continually navigate competing internal priorities and rebuild support rather than rely on the assumption of a sustained institutional commitment.

SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels

The fourth theme, *SIOs Are Restricted by Conditions and Policies at Global, National, and State Levels*, expands on this theme of constraint to explore the influence of geopolitical issues, national immigration policies, state politics, and other major influences beyond the campus. Participants described how their environment was constantly shifting. For example, international initiatives such as study abroad programs could be upended overnight by a global event, a new policy decree, or a pandemic. The participants suggested global and national forces are not merely episodic annoyances; instead, they were viewed as structural conditions that continuously shape internationalization efforts. One participant captured this sentiment on global events, stating, “If nobody is worried about it, then their vision for international is not in the right place.” In this context, SIOs do not have the luxury of acting as long-term planners. They are more akin to agile navigators rooted in unstable systems. The rhetoric and then-unknown result of the U.S. Presidential campaign between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump during data collection for this study exacerbated some of this anxiety.

Participants’ reflections align with literature that describes how political shifts, policy changes, global health emergencies, and geopolitical conflicts regularly disrupted ongoing initiatives, sometimes making months or years of planning irrelevant overnight (Havergal, 2022; Martel, 2020; Rumbley et al., 2022). Although the COVID-19 global pandemic was not invoked as a current example during the interviews in 2024, the memory of COVID was still fresh as a disruptive global event, with participants sometimes referring to the challenges they had previously experienced during the pandemic. These external forces contributed to a sense of anxiety among the participants.

At the state level, several participants described political climates that created additional constraints on internationalization. Institutions located in politically conservative environments reported public skepticism toward international engagement and heightened sensitivity around globally oriented messaging. One anonymous participant explained, “Here, you have to watch what you say, when you say it, and who you say it to.” For this participant, even successful international initiatives were communicated discreetly to avoid unwanted backlash from state officials or other unsupportive stakeholders. These accounts suggest state-level political norms, in addition to national policy shifts and global events, shape what kinds of international strategies SIOs can pursue openly and how they must frame their work to gain support.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 affirms the significance of these forces. Rising nationalism has constrained cross-border mobility and created inhospitable political climates for international students and scholars (Altbach & de Wit, 2015; Brøgger, 2021; Ross, 2022). The U.S. travel bans enacted during the first Trump administration serve as a relevant case, leading to measurable declines in international student enrollment and heightened uncertainty (Anderson & Svrluga, 2018; Hacker & Bellmore, 2020). Geopolitical conflict has disrupted institutional partnerships, research collaborations, and elevated student safety (Havergal, 2022; Temnycky, 2022). COVID’s sweeping impact on mobility and revenue streams has been widely documented (Martel, 2020; Rumbley et al., 2022), reinforcing the reality that external factors are neither rare nor peripheral, but are constant impediments for the SIO.

For many participants, the sheer relentlessness of political shifts, policy changes, global health emergencies, and geopolitical conflicts sometimes made months or years of planning irrelevant overnight. As Santiago observed, “It never ends . . . they were our partners, and now it’s much harder to do the work because of geopolitics,” capturing how sustained volatility

undermined a longstanding international partnership overnight. As addressed in the second finding, SIOs described continually revising and reorienting internationalization efforts as these external conditions changed around them. In this environment, strategy is not abandoned but becomes inherently flexible and responsive.

External factors are not interruptions to the work of internationalization; they are part of its core operating environment. For the participants, their experience navigating constant change led them to expect that global conditions will continue to evolve. This is not an abandonment of a strategy; again, it acknowledges that any internationalization strategy must be inherently flexible to survive in an environment where the next external shock is not a possibility but viewed as an inevitability. This finding shows that external geopolitical, national, and state-level forces do not influence internationalization from a distance. External forces actively shaped how the SIOs in this study formulated and implemented internationalization strategies, pushing them toward reactive, flexible, and continuously adaptive approaches rather than predetermined plans.

SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints

The first four findings highlight the challenges faced by participants. This final theme, *SIOs Advance Internationalization Through Pragmatic Actions Amid Constraints*, describes concrete actions participants used to demonstrate creative and resilient leadership in the face of adversity. Strategies outlined in this finding illustrate a form of leadership that is pragmatic, context sensitive, and deeply relational. They include (a) the importance of tailoring internationalization efforts in alignment with institutional priorities, (b) a robust approach to campus engagement and alliance building to establish a coalition of the enthused, and (c) strategic fiscal management in ways that generate revenue for the international office to establish greater budgetary autonomy.

Participants in this study described how their planning activities were shaped first and foremost by the need to align internationalization priorities with broader institutional agendas. Formal long-term strategic planning was often viewed as impractical, or even counterproductive, when it risked producing goals disconnected from the institution's most pressing priorities. Medina noted bluntly that "our president doesn't like strategic plans," capturing a leadership climate where detailed, stand-alone roadmaps were discouraged in favor of actions that visibly advanced the administration's existing agenda. Although several participants acknowledged windows of opportunity sometimes required them to act quickly and adapt plans, these moments were generally navigated within the boundaries set by institutional priorities.

This approach aligns with Childress's (2010) observation that embedding global engagement within established activities increases both feasibility and institutional support. This approach also echoes Hudzik's (2011, 2014) argument that comprehensive internationalization is most effective when integrated into core institutional systems, rather than developed as a parallel track.

Participants also described the importance of speaking in the language of institutional priorities, a tactic Hudzik and Stohl (2012) recommended for aligning global engagement with an institution's strategic goals. Rather than presenting global engagement as a broad societal good, participants often translated their objectives into terms that resonated with decision makers, such as enrollment growth, student retention, revenue generation, workforce development, or research competitiveness. This kind of framing functioned as a bridge between the activities commonly led by SIOs and the metrics valued by senior leadership. Agnew (2013) similarly suggested institutional culture shapes how internationalization is perceived and that alignment with prevailing narratives can be decisive in securing support.

The ability to act on such adaptive planning often depended on relationships across the institution, the second tactic of this finding. Many participants described the deliberate cultivation of alliances as essential to achieving progress, echoing Brewer and Leask's (2012) observation that embedding global perspectives in the curriculum and cocurriculum depends on cross-campus collaboration. Zaria explained, "I probably spend 80% of my time outside of the international office and with other colleges. Because structurally I have no authority at all. It's all soft power." In the absence of formal authority, SIOs described building trust and rapport with deans, faculty, midlevel administrators, compliance units, enrollment managers, and student affairs staff. These alliances created networks of advocates and partners who could help advance projects, support curricular change, or champion internationalization in governance settings, consistent with Dewey and Duff's (2009) finding internationalization requires systemic and coordinated collaboration between faculty and administrators.

Participants emphasized the importance of political acumen when building alliances. Understanding which individuals or units had real influence, and adjusting to connect to their priorities, was sometimes a critical factor in moving initiatives forward. Although such adaptations could mean scaling back the original vision, participants saw these negotiations as necessary to maintain momentum in an environment where internationalization was not viewed as a top-tier institutional priority.

Participants also described a wide range of revenue strategies to fund their international operation, including administrative fees on study abroad programs, international student fees to support advising and compliance, tuition from intensive English programs, external grants, philanthropic donations, and fee-for-service contracts with partners. Kobe even pointed to their IT department's practice of charging a small service fee when they set up phones, saying, "We

wanted to go into this model.” Although these funds were rarely intended to enrich the institution as a whole, they provided essential support for staffing, programming, and operations in the international office. In this respect, international offices were not just adapting to academic capitalism but actively operating within its logic, adopting entrepreneurial behaviors to maintain their viability. This aligns with Altbach and Knight’s (2007) observation that revenue generation has become a defining rationale for internationalization in the 21st century.

For some participants, independent revenue streams had become a source of strategic leadership advantage, allowing for greater fiscal autonomy from the predilections of senior leadership and their central budgets. This echoes writing by Hudzik and Pynes (2013) that encouraged internationalization leaders to thinking creative about establishing sustainable resources for internationalization, including from external sources. Having independent revenue streams that funded the international office enabled participants to act without having to beg their leadership for money. These fee or external revenues streams were viewed as essential to advancing international initiatives. However, this mad dash for cash runs the risk of distorting priorities, pulling the SIO’s attention toward financially lucrative activities rather than investing time in the opportunities that are most closely aligned with other priorities and goals.

Taken together, these strategies present a portrait of internationalization leadership that is adaptive, engaged, and resourceful. SIOs in this study each navigated their institutional contexts by developing flexible strategies, cultivating strategic relationships, and managing resources in entrepreneurial ways. They acted decisively when opportunities arose, framed their work in terms that resonated with their campus leadership, and built coalitions capable of sustaining momentum even when central priorities shifted. Financial innovation became another tool in the SIO’s toolkit. These examples show how internationalization can advance when leaders are

prepared to work within, around, and sometimes against unfavorable institutional structures. Although external and internal conditions impact the SIO's work, these leaders showed how meaningful progress is possible when actions are grounded in contextual awareness, strategic relationships, and an opportunistic mindset.

This section has provided a detailed discussion of this study's five findings, drawing on participant excerpts and relevant literature to clarify how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies in complex and often constrained institutional environments. These findings highlight the context-dependent nature of SIO leadership and reveal the strategic forms of adaptability and alignment that enable progress in the face of competing priorities.

Discussion of Theoretical Frameworks and the Findings

This research study was conducted with two theoretical frameworks, academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle (Knight, 1994). Each framework contributed to the construction of the interview discussion topics and informed the data analysis phase of this study. Each framework intersects with this study in distinct ways. In this section, I briefly reintroduce each framework and highlight important linkages with the findings of this study. I conclude this section by sharing reflections on the need for imagining new theoretical frameworks and introduce *Dynamic Internationalization Leadership* a starting point for further discussion.

Academic Capitalism

Academic capitalism provides a critical lens for understanding how market forces influence higher education and, by extension, the internationalization strategies developed and implemented by SIOs. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) originally defined academic capitalism as "institutional and professorial market or marketlike efforts to secure external moneys" (p. 8). Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) expanded the concept to describe the broader shift in higher

education toward a market-oriented regime. This shift is deeply rooted in neoliberalism, described by Chomsky (1999) as “the defining political economic paradigm of our time” (p. 7), which emphasizes commercialization, privatization, and deregulation. Over the past several decades in the United States, declining state appropriations and a corresponding push for private revenue streams have reframed higher education from a public good into a privately consumed commodity (Giroux, 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Within international higher education, neoliberalism casts international students as consumers purchasing a credential (Kauppinen, 2012; Kauppinen & Cantwell, 2014). Raby and Zhang’s (2020) review of 143 articles across 17 journals underscored how neoliberalism is used as a prevailing research paradigm in scholarship on international students. This framing positions internationalization not simply as cultural exchange or knowledge sharing but as a revenue-seeking enterprise that increasingly links institutional priorities to market incentives.

Academic capitalism highlights how universities both participate in and reinforce neoliberalism through entrepreneurial behaviors (Cantwell & Kauppinen, 2014). Institutions act as marketers, blurring the boundaries between public and private goods via revenue-driven research, public–private partnerships, proprietary programs, and targeted recruitment strategies (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Public disinvestment compels institutions to pursue income from tuition, grants, and other global activities, making revenue generation a primary driver of internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cantwell, 2015; de Wit & Altbach, 2020). For SIOs, this framework drives the strategic choices they make. International students, who frequently pay higher nonresident tuition rates than in-state students, have helped offset funding cuts at research-intensive public universities (Bound et al., 2016). Beyond tuition, SIOs engage in internationally funded research collaborations, externally

sponsored projects, study abroad program fees, and philanthropic campaigns that align internationalization with the revenue imperatives of academic capitalism (Knight, 2012). In this study, participants repeatedly returned to financial considerations when describing their leadership behaviors, revealing how deeply neoliberal market forces permeate decision making.

Several findings from this research affirm the presence, as well as the uneven influence, of academic capitalism in practice. Participants reported institutional expectations for revenue generation varied depending on local political climates, institutional legacies, and leadership priorities. Some universities explicitly charged SIOs with generating entrepreneurial revenue or recruiting international students (Cantwell, 2015; Deschamps & Lee, 2015; Glass & Lee, 2018). Others provided more stable central funding, allowing SIOs to prioritize academic partnerships or faculty support. This variability reinforces the first significant finding of the study, which notes that the SIO role is context-specific and inconsistent, shaped by forces largely outside the direct control of the SIO.

Academic capitalism also sheds light on the appeal of opportunism as a strategic planning choice, aligning with the second finding of this study. In resource-constrained environments, SIOs often pursue initiatives promising near-term revenue or external funding even when those initiatives are not part of a broader strategic plan (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cantwell, 2015). These decisions should not be interpreted as a rejection of strategy. Instead, they represent adaptive alignment with institutional incentives, political conditions, and market opportunities. This responsiveness, pursuing what is feasible over what is ideal, mirrors the pragmatism observed throughout the study.

The final finding emphasized tactics SIOs use to advance internationalization amid institutional impediments. In addition to relational and political strategies, participants

emphasized the importance of financial acumen. Several participants described the expectation to generate revenue not merely for institutional advancement but to sustain their own offices. Paris observed, “I’m expected to help the colleges figure out how to generate revenue.” Lucia elaborated, “I have to generate revenue for my division because I’d say we’re probably something like, in rough numbers, 60% fee funded and 40% centrally funded.” Notably, some participants framed these efforts as self-initiated rather than top-down mandates. They sought external fees, pursued grants with cost-recovery components, and engaged in philanthropy to support their core operations. This shift resembles the financial logic of other units in higher education, such as housing, dining, or parking services, entities expected to operate on a cost-recovery basis exclusively through user fees.

As academic capitalism becomes not only an institutional expectation but perhaps even an existential necessity for international offices, future SIOs will need to monitor how they balance revenue generation with programmatic, service, and regulatory functions. Taken together, these observations illustrate the profound reach of academic capitalism into internationalization leadership. Market forces do not merely influence external partnerships or enrollment targets; they shape SIO priorities, tactics, and even the survival of their offices. This framework, therefore, provides a useful lens for understanding SIO behavior in a neoliberal environment. It also cautions against assuming a purely mission-driven approach to internationalization as the pressures of academic capitalism create conflicted paths, where entrepreneurial action may be both a pragmatic necessity and a potential distortion of other values. Recognizing and critically engaging with these pressures is essential for SIOs seeking to lead effectively within the evolving landscape of higher education.

Internationalization Cycle

The internationalization cycle (Knight, 1994) is the second theoretical framework for this study. Knight observed many colleges and universities struggled to translate a broad commitment to internationalization into a practical, integrated strategy. As shown in Figure 1, introduced in Chapter 2, and repeated here, Knight's internationalization cycle features six interconnected elements—awareness, commitment, planning, operationalize, review, and reinforcement—to guide institutions through a continuous, iterative process of embedding the international dimension into campus systems and values. The framework's clarity and simplicity made it a foundational reference point for early SIOs several decades ago, and it continues to inform recent scholarship on faculty engagement (Childress, 2010), ASEAN campus internationalization (Tanhueco-Nepomuceno, 2019), faculty research in Brazil and China (Gokbel, 2020), and U.S. institutional practices (Morena, 2023). The internationalization cycle reflects the conditions and assumptions of its time. Developed in the 1990s, it presupposes that SIOs intentionally plan and implement strategies in a stable environment where leadership commitment is imminent. The findings of this study suggest some of these assumptions may be less relevant today.

Figure 1

Internationalization Cycle



The framework's emphasis on *awareness*, for example, is still important, but in practice, was often viewed as inconsistent. Participants described situations where institutional stakeholders lacked a nuanced understanding of the SIO's responsibilities or undervalued the strategic contributions of the role. This inconsistent approach to the SIO role is present in the first finding of this study. Without that awareness, expectations went unmet, resources remained scarce, and SIOs confronted a gap between an institution's stated priorities and its operational support for internationalization. The absence of a commonly understood definition of the SIO role further complicates comparisons across institutions or evaluations of success, underscoring

awareness today should extend beyond a generic appreciation for global engagement to a recognition of the SIO's context-specific responsibilities.

Through the lens of the second finding, the *planning* stage of Knight's (1994) framework similarly appears too structured and stable for contemporary SIOs. Participants' reflections focused less on executing a preset plan. Instead, participants shared more about leading with a readiness to adapt, react, and capitalize on emergent opportunities. Rather than representing a departure from best practice, this adaptability may be a preferred approach in an era when institutions operate within volatile ecosystems shaped by shifting leadership priorities, market pressures, and external crises. SIOs in this study described implementing internationalization as a strategic tool aligned with institutional imperatives rather than as an independent, mission-driven pursuit of societal good or student-centered outcomes. Recognizing this dynamic enables leaders to set realistic expectations, establish priorities that align with local conditions, and pragmatically align their efforts with their institutions.

Commitment, another element of the internationalization cycle, was also discussed as an impediment in this study's third finding. The internationalization cycle portrays commitment as both symbolic and tangible support from senior leaders, governing boards, faculty, and staff. The presumption is echoed in literature, where leadership commitment is repeatedly cited as critical for legitimacy and resource allocation (Hudzik & Stohl, 2012; Nolan, 2018). Nevertheless, participants frequently noted leadership backing would waver with changes in presidents, provosts, or boards. In some cases, internationalization was championed publicly but inadequately funded. For others, internationalization was sidelined entirely by leadership agendas focused on pressing local or political concerns. The experiences of the participants

complicate the straightforward progression implied by the internationalization cycle and reveal the fragility of commitment as a stable expectation for strategic planning.

External disruptions further destabilized the aspirational image of the internationalization cycle. Salvador captured this reality succinctly by saying, “I spent the better part of my career trying to build ties with China. Now I find myself dismantling those very ties.” Participants described abandoning long-cultivated relationships, rewriting policies overnight, or pivoting to alternative regions or program models in response to geopolitical tensions, pandemics, or shifts in national policy. Instead of moving with clarity from planning to operationalization to review, they found themselves in a perpetual state of adjustment, reacting to forces well beyond their control.

Similarly, the *operationalize* and *review* phases of the internationalization cycle were experienced less as discrete phases and more as part of the ongoing and overlapping processes. The participants rarely had direct authority over the academic units or services central to implementing internationalization. Instead, success depended on forging alliances with faculty, deans, and administrative offices willing to collaborate or share resources. Without these campus partners, carefully drafted strategies stalled. The review phase presents its own challenges, as success was sometimes measured less by educational or societal outcomes and more by revenue generated or costs recovered, reflecting the market logics described under academic capitalism.

Taken together, these findings reveal that the internationalization cycle, although historically valuable, does not fully address the complex, contingent, and reactive realities of today’s SIOs. Internationalization leadership unfolds less as a step-by-step process and more as a dynamic, concurrent set of practices shaped by shifting realities, competing priorities, and unanticipated challenges. This study suggests that scholars and practitioners might aim to refresh

the internationalization cycle, not to discard its insights but to reimagine its application. I believe a more dynamic image of internationalization leadership that reflects the overlapping, nonlinear, and often reactive nature of the work would better reflect the work of today's SIO.

Toward Future Frameworks

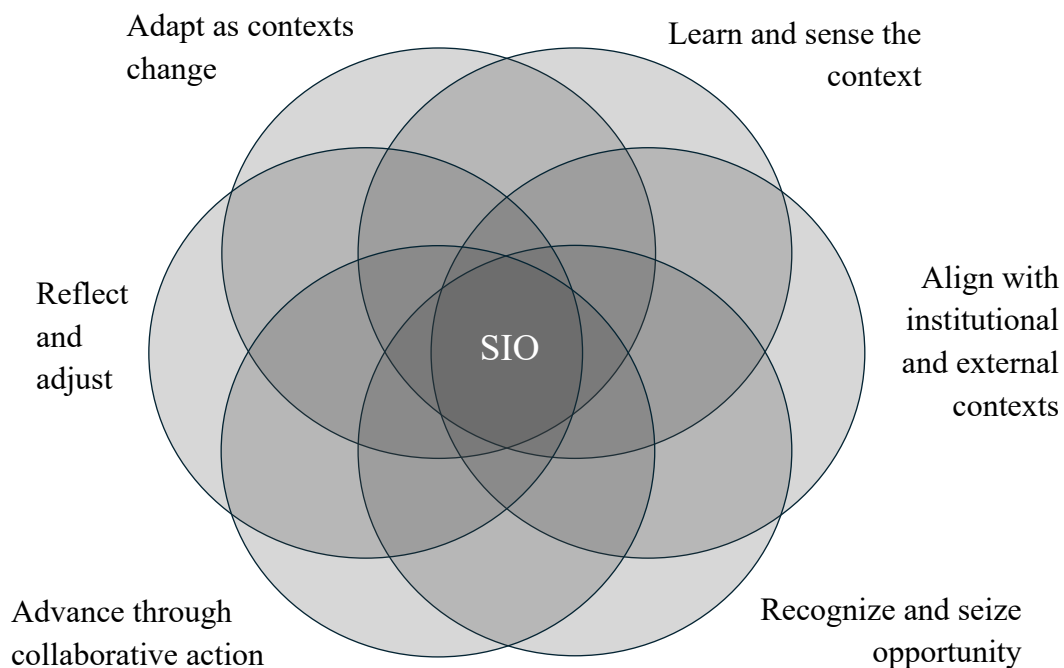
For the participants in my study, SIOs do not advance internationalization through a tidy, sequential leadership process. Instead, SIOs operate in fluid environments shaped by institutional priorities, external conditions, and evolving political and economic realities. This study used the internationalization cycle as a theoretical framework, and my findings suggest leadership in the higher education internationalization domain is more responsive, opportunistic, and adaptive than the internationalization cycle implies. Even Knight's (1994) acknowledgement that the process is iterative cannot fully capture how SIOs are required to operate in real time. The linearity of the internationalization cycle as initially designed does not reflect contemporary realities faced by senior administrators, who adjust their leadership choices constantly as they respond to shifting internal and external influences. Additionally, the neutered role of the SIO suggests that the internationalization cycle's call to build awareness and generate meaningful commitment from institutional leadership seems too aspirational in today's higher education environment.

To better reflect the realities described in this study, I propose we develop new or revised frameworks. A contemporary framework should reflect the reality that internationalization is not advanced through a linear cycle, but through ongoing and adaptive forms of leadership that constantly respond to shifting contexts, opportunities, and constraints. The model should reflect the dynamic, fluid, and ever-evolving nature of this work, emphasizing effective leadership

requires simultaneous attention to multiple conditions at once. Rather than moving through a set of sequential steps, new models might show how SIOs engage in concurrent practices.

Figure 2

Dynamic Internationalization Leadership



To catalyze further discussion and scholarship, please refer to Figure 2 for my contribution to this discussion, *Dynamic Internationalization Leadership*. The figure is comprised of the following six interrelated leadership practices: Learn and Sense the Context; Align with Institutional and External Contexts; Recognize and Seize Opportunity; Advance Through Collaborative Action; Continuous Reflection and Adjustment; and Adapt to Ongoing Change. Together, these six actions offer a new perspective on how SIOs pursue internationalization within complex and often constrained environments.

An important feature of this image is that the practices are presented as six overlapping circles, each representing each of the six actions. These are not presented as distinct steps to be followed in order, nor do they assume the presence of a predictable institutional commitment or a long-range strategic plan. Rather, they represent recurring leadership actions that SIOs might use in their role. In many respects, SIOs should be prepared to engage in all six practices simultaneously and continuously.

Each of these six practices is loosely related to one of the six phases of the internationalization cycle. In contrast to Knight's (1994) first step of raising *awareness*, the findings of this study suggest SIOs should work to *learn and sense the context*, even withholding overt action until the broader landscape is keenly understood. This reflects one of Lucia's comments, "It took me 6 months just to figure out where the informal decisions were really being made." Rather than garnering a firm *commitment* from leadership, SIOs might seek to squarely *align with institutional and external contexts*, thereby avoiding the need to campaign for support for something new or additive. Bamako did this begrudgingly as they pivoted from curriculum to work force development to align with clear institutional priorities. Formal *planning* might be replaced by *recognize and seize opportunities* when they emerge. This approach was a central feature of Salvador's leadership, saying "We are always ready to move when an opportunity pops up." The *operationalize* phase is not conducted in a vacuum but instead is *advanced through collaborative action* with campus partners. This mirrors Zaria's reference to having "no authority" and relying on "soft power," and is reinforced by the views of several participants as they shared they spend 80% of their time building campus alliances. The *review* phase remains as a process of continuous *reflection and adjustment*. In Softa's case, when something was removed from their portfolio, they "didn't fight it," saying "it wasn't worth it."

They adjusted and moved on. Finally, *reinforcement* is reframed as *adapt as contexts changes*. A frequent refrain throughout this study is that campus and external circumstances change, demanding an adaptive mindset. In the middle of the image, where all the circles overlap, I note the *SIO* in the center of the figure. This signals that the SIO is engaging in all activities simultaneously and in an ongoing fashion. Taken together, this image presents a dynamic, responsive, interconnected, and constantly evolving look at the current role of the SIO. I recommend that future scholars similarly develop new frameworks and models that fully capture the work of SIOs and internationalization leadership.

Summary of Study

This section synthesizes the dissertation's findings to answer the two research questions of the study.

- How do SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement comprehensive internationalization strategies in the face of competing priorities among multiple internal campus stakeholders?

The findings suggest SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions formulate and implement internationalization strategies through a process that is fluid, context dependent, and shaped by competing institutional priorities. Because the SIO role is inconsistently defined across institutions, strategic approaches varied widely across the participants. Some SIOs held cabinet-level influence while others operated with limited authority and inconsistent access to decision-making channels. These structural differences created uneven conditions for formulating strategy, forcing some SIOs to reactively determine their institution's approach to international activity and to set their goals accordingly. Strategy development was not a singular or commonly

accepted process, but rather an adaptive practice shaped by local circumstances and the predilections of senior leadership and the campus environment.

Rather than developing internationalization through formalized, institution-wide planning, most SIOs described informal and unsystematic approaches to setting priorities. In practice, this meant that internationalization strategies were often guided by short-term opportunities, administrative changes, or the campus interests of the moment, rather than by comprehensive and long-term planning frameworks. As a result, implementation of specific strategies and initiatives required flexibility and constant recalibration. SIOs frequently adjusted their plans to align with presidential agendas, college or faculty-level initiatives, enrollment-driven pressures, and other campus realities.

Institutional dynamics also played a powerful role in shaping how strategies were both formulated and implemented. Many SIOs operated in environments where competing agendas and limited understanding of internationalization constrained what could be accomplished. Institutional silos, decentralized authority, and shifting leadership priorities often impeded progress. To advance their goals, SIOs relied on coalition building and persuasion, investing significant time in cultivating support among faculty, deans, and other administrators.

Ultimately, the formulation and implementation of internationalization strategies among SIOs were less about executing predetermined plans and more about exercising adaptive leadership within complex, multilayered ecosystems. The participants balanced competing priorities, navigated fragile institutional commitments, and implemented strategies through their campus networks. This pragmatic approach allowed them to sustain internationalization in environments where priorities, funding, and leadership support were constantly in flux.

- How do external forces, such as geopolitical conflict and global pandemics, influence how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies?

The findings show external forces at global, national, and state levels exert a powerful and sustained influence on how SIOs formulate and implement internationalization strategies. These forces do not serve merely as background conditions, rather, they are active drivers that ultimately define what is possible for institutional engagement globally. Geopolitical conflict, political tensions, and the pandemic interrupted established international partnerships, reshaped patterns of student mobility, and demanded SIOs shift from long-term planning toward short-term responsiveness. At the national level, shifts in federal policy regarding visas, research, and international collaboration have required ongoing vigilance and rapid adjustment. At the state level, increased legislative scrutiny of higher education, notably in red states, have had tremendous impact.

SIOs described how these multiple pressures often converged, forcing them to assess risks and unwind existing activities and obligations. For example, restrictive travel policies or public criticism of international collaborations undermined years of relationship building, notably with China. Some SIOs shared they operate in politically sensitive environments where internationalization priorities had to be adjusted to emphasize workforce relevance or economic development, rather than cultural exchange or educational enhancement. Some participants faced state-imposed policies that constrained global engagement. Under these conditions, the work of internationalization became less about executing an existing plan and more about advancing pragmatic opportunity in the face of persistent constraint. These conditions reinforced strategy formulation among SIOs is neither a linear nor aspirational process. It depends on assessing shifting global, national, and state contexts and then aligning institutional capacity to what can

realistically be achieved. Leaders must interpret political climates, anticipate emerging risks, and act within boundaries set by forces outside their control.

The findings demonstrate that internationalization strategy at land-grant institutions is shaped as much by reaction as by design. SIOs are continually interpreting and responding to shifting external realities, not retreating from their mission but adapting its expression to fit the moment. This expectation to recalibrate and sustain activity amid uncertainty illustrates a central feature of pragmatic internationalization, leadership defined less by adherence to predetermined plans and more by the capacity to respond effectively to forces beyond the SIO's control.

Implications and Recommendations

This section outlines implications of this study for both scholarship and professional practice and provides recommendations for future research. The implications highlight how internationalization is experienced in context and present ideas on how it might be more effectively understood, supported, and studied going forward.

Implications for Scholarship

This study offers several contributions to the scholarship on internationalization and higher education leadership. First, it provides a practitioner-centered account of internationalization as it is experienced and enacted by SIOs at land-grant institutions in the United States. This study centers the voices of those charged with implementing internationalization in daily practice. Through candid conversations, the qualitative data generated by this study reveal the complex and, at times, frustrating realities of working in this role, offering insight into how SIOs navigate competing priorities, financial constraints, shifting institutional politics, and external disruptions.

One feature of this study is its exclusive focus on SIOs as the participant group. Although many previous studies explore internationalization through the lens of senior leadership, faculty, or international education units, studies that exclusively center the SIO are less common. By narrowing the participant pool to those formally charged with leading internationalization strategy on their campuses, the study shows how individuals in these roles understand their mandates, interpret institutional signals, and act within their scope of influence. The result is a more nuanced understanding of the SIO not as an abstract position but as a highly variable, context-sensitive role that reflects institutional culture, leadership structure, and broader political forces.

The study is also situated within a specific institutional category: land-grant universities. This choice brings additional depth to the findings. Land-grant institutions carry a distinct historical mission to serve the public good through teaching, research, and engagement. They are often closely linked to state-level priorities such as workforce development, rural access, and economic mobility. These institutional commitments to their state shaped how SIOs described their priorities and constraints throughout this study. Internationalization was frequently positioned not as a separate endeavor but as one aligned within the land-grant mission, contributing to research output, student access, institutional reputation, or state-level objectives. This focus enhances the study's contribution by connecting internationalization to its institution's public mission, a theme that merits further exploration in international education literature.

The study also makes a timely contribution in terms of historical and political context. Data were collected a couple of years after the COVID-19 global pandemic, when many international offices were rebuilding operations, revisiting priorities, and navigating new

institutional expectations. Although the study captures a moment of reemergence and innovation in the field, it also precedes a significant new wave of chaos and disruption, with the 2024 U.S. presidential election ushering in a return of Donald Trump and renewed uncertainty for global engagement, immigration policy, research, and higher education. This dissertation offers a snapshot of the field at a critical inflection point, documenting how SIOs led after the COVID recovery and laying the groundwork for understanding how future crises may be managed.

Finally, this study also offers a unique scholarly contribution through my position as a practitioner–researcher. As someone who has worked in a leadership role advancing internationalization at a land-grant institution, albeit not as the SIO, I bring an understanding of institutional dynamics, practitioner language, and field-specific challenges to the research design, data collection, and analysis. My position enabled a high level of participant trust and candor, informing a nuanced, empathetic interpretation of their experiences. The result is a study that analyzes SIO leadership from outside the participants’ institutions, while incorporating realities of the profession with my insider knowledge. Beyond its scholarly implications, the study also raises several considerations for professional practice in international education leadership.

Implications for Practice

This study raises implications for professional practice in international education leadership. A consistent reflection is present throughout the themes; the role of the SIO is increasingly complex, shaped by institutional context, evolving external conditions, and rising financial pressures. These dynamics challenge conventional wisdom about internationalization and require institutions, professional associations, and higher education leadership development programs to rethink how internationalization and its leaders are defined, supported, and sustained.

For example, the findings of this study suggest institutions that choose to espouse internationalization as a clear priority might benefit from explicitly defining and supporting the SIO role as a central figure who leads internationalization activities. Participants in this study described widely divergent levels of access, authority, and visibility, with some positioned as central players and others operating on the margins. By withholding tools to be a successful administrator, such as limited access to senior leaders, exclusion from senior decision-making spaces, and insufficient resources, SIOs can be held accountable for outcomes they are poorly equipped to implement. This disconnect undermines institutional goals and sets up leaders for frustration or failure.

The findings also suggest traditional models of leadership development may be insufficient. Aspiring and current SIOs need more than generic training in executive leadership. SIOs must be prepared to operate within organizational ecosystems defined by ambiguity, constraint, and institutional priorities that may or may not align with their personal values regarding global engagement. Leadership development programs should emphasize contextual navigation, adaptive strategy, political acumen, fiscal management, and cross-functional coalition building. These are skills that are central to the daily work of international education leadership today.

The study finds that internationalization is not a static strategy, but a dynamic and often reactive set of practices shaped by internal and external forces. Institutions should build flexibility into their structures and strategic processes, allowing internationalization to adapt in real time rather than adhere to fixed plans. SIOs need the tools and authority to respond to shifting conditions, from political upheaval to budget crises, to guide their institutions' international efforts effectively through these changes.

As institutional contexts evolve, so too must the professional profile of the SIO. Some international offices are expected to function like auxiliary units, emphasizing services that are self-funding, entrepreneurial, and responsive to opportunities. Some SIOs are designing project plans, projecting and managing revenue streams, pursuing philanthropy, and guiding the overall fiscal picture for a sizable division. These responsibilities require skill in budgeting, institutional finance, and revenue generation, competencies not always emphasized in traditional academic training or leadership pathways. This transformation might be complicating the role of the SIO further and risks widening the gap between mission-driven ideals and market-driven realities. Future professional development should reflect this evolution, equipping leaders with not only academic or programmatic expertise but also the financial and operational knowledge necessary to be a successful SIO.

Finally, the study highlights the value of practical strategies SIOs use to advance internationalization in constrained environments. These include building coalitions across campus, securing funding sources not dependent on presidential discretion, aligning efforts with institutional priorities, and leading through influence rather than authority. Although such strategies may appear modest, they reflect a grounded understanding of how real change occurs within complex higher education systems. This study ultimately invites a realistic view of international education leadership that honors both the aspirations and the constraints of the work. Professional practice in this field must evolve to support SIOs not only as visionaries but as politically astute, financially savvy, and contextually grounded leaders. Success will depend not just on bold ideas, but on the ability to execute strategic actions in imperfect conditions.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study present a complex portrait of SIOs as they navigate institutional priorities, shifting global conditions, constrained authority, and financial pressures in their efforts to advance internationalization. Although the findings contribute new insight into how internationalization is enacted within U.S. higher education institutions, they also raise critical questions about leadership, institutional structures, and the evolving purpose of internationalization. Each of the findings suggests important directions for future scholarship. These recommendations for future research build on the limitations of this study outlined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The study raises questions about international offices' financial structure and their evolving identity, some of which now operate with auxiliary-like characteristics. Although some international units are expected to contribute revenue to institutional budgets, nearly all participants in this study reported being expected to generate some revenue to financially support their own operations, often through student fees, grants and projects, tuition arrangements, or philanthropy. This shift raises concerns about equity, sustainability, and institutional support for internationalization, presenting opportunities for future research. Comparative research across institution types, such as land-grant universities, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, and community colleges, could help determine whether this financial model is widespread or emerging mostly in specific sectors.

Future research should expand the range of perspectives and institutions included in this type of study. This dissertation focused on SIOs at U.S.-based land-grant institutions. Global engagement efforts are shaped by various actors, including faculty, midlevel staff, students, senior administrators, and external partners. Including these voices in future studies can provide

a more comprehensive understanding of how internationalization is experienced, interpreted, and enacted across the institution. Likewise, further research should examine community colleges and minority-serving institutions, offering valuable insight into additional approaches to global engagement.

Geographical expansion is also essential. Research in internationalization has historically centered on institutions in North America, Europe, and Australia. However, internationalization strategies are active across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Comparative and regional studies could explore the global relevance and adaptability of concepts introduced in this study. Such engagement would validate or challenge these findings of this study and surface new perspectives that advance the field.

Methodologically, future research could benefit from longitudinal studies tracking how institutional priorities, leadership roles, and internationalization strategies evolve. Comparative case studies across institution types or world regions would enrich the understanding of context-specific variation. Mixed methods studies might provide even richer data sets that produce valuable findings. Future empirical studies could investigate how alternative theoretical frameworks, beyond my choices of academic capitalism and the internationalization cycle would offer important new perspectives.

This study also raises questions about the field's prevailing definitions of the term *internationalization*. When SIOs are tasked with achieving institutional or economic goals, but scholarship continues to emphasize different outcomes, I see a disconnect. If left unaddressed, this gap might alienate practitioners and diminish the credibility of the field. Definitions of internationalization should be reimagined to reflect both the realities of practice along with the aspirations of the profession, anchored in feasibility, but still guided by values. Researchers

might examine how definitions of internationalization are constructed in strategic plans, accreditation documents, or public discourse, and whether these definitions align with how international work is authentically implemented on campus.

For example, as introduced in Chapter 2, scholars have described *comprehensive internationalization* as an idealized, institution-wide commitment to embedding global engagement into all aspects of teaching, research, and service (Hudzik, 2011). Although this vision established a valuable target for the field, the findings from this study indicate SIOs rarely operate in environments where such a fully integrated model is present or even achievable. Instead, participants described a more constrained, adaptive, and contextually bound reality, suggesting comprehensive internationalization might be best described as an aspirational target.

For example, future studies might explore the work of the SIO through a more *pragmatic* lens. As a starting point for future researchers, as a result of this study, I view pragmatic internationalization as a responsive, context-driven approach to advancing global engagement in higher education that aligns actions with institutional priorities, responds to external constraints, and focuses on achievable, incremental progress toward broader internationalization goals. A pragmatic orientation emphasizes doing what can be done in the real world, rather than aiming for what might be done in a more idealized scenario. It acknowledges that SIOs must navigate competing demands, limited resources, and shifting leadership priorities, while still doing the work they are expected to do.

Unlike other definitions that aspire to realize systemic transformation, pragmatic internationalization accepts that progress is often incremental and uneven. It focuses on actions rather than aspirational strategies, giving greater priority to the implementation of what is possible over the rhetoric of what is imaginable. In doing so, it reframes success, rather than

measuring achievement solely against an idealized standard. Pragmatic internationalization values tangible, context-appropriate outcomes that reflect both current possibilities and longer-term ambitions.

As institutions and practitioners continue to adapt to changing conditions, the field of international higher education will benefit from research that is responsive, grounded, and reflective of the complex realities that shape global engagement work. Continued inquiry in these areas will strengthen the scholarly and professional understandings of how internationalization can be led effectively in complex and rapidly changing environments.

Leading Internationalization in the Trump Administration Era

Although the interviews for this dissertation were conducted prior to the 2024 U.S. presidential election, several participants expressed concern about what a second Trump administration might mean for internationalization in higher education. At the time, these concerns were hypothetical and rooted in memories of the first Trump administration's restrictive policy environment. As I finalize this dissertation in 2025, those concerns have materialized. The current federal climate is decidedly adversarial toward higher education, and its impact on global engagement work is already visible (Borthakur, 2025; Kang et al., 2025; President's Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2025).

In the first months of the administration, an array of federal actions has created significant operational and political headwinds for colleges and universities. Several large international exchange and development programs, mostly in the U.S. Department of State or U.S. Department of Education, have been threatened or essentially eliminated. Institutions are exercising caution considering broader federal efforts to reduce or limit the presence of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Because internationalization initiatives often intersect

with DEI goals and offices, even indirect policy changes can have ripple effects that constrain the work of SIOs. Some flagship institutions have already paused or reevaluated international partnerships while assessing the emerging policy landscape (Nash, 2025). Initial reports show a substantial drop in international student enrollment in Fall 2025 (Alonso, 2025).

The current environment underscores the importance of pragmatic internationalization as an overarching orientation for SIOs. In a period marked by policy uncertainty, resource constraints, and increased public skepticism toward global engagement, internationalization cannot always proceed according to its most ambitious and idealized visions. Pragmatic approaches, whether in the form of setting smaller international student enrollment goals or advancing new and realistic outcomes, will allow institutions to do their best to advance global engagement in the face of increasing constraints. These strategies are not concessions but disciplined and contextually grounded forms of leadership. The Trump Administration represents an acute manifestation of the dynamics captured in this study. Future research on internationalization in higher education will undoubtedly need to engage directly with the consequences of this administration, especially as the scope and trajectory of its actions continue to evolve.

Reflections on the Dissertation Journey

The end of any long journey is a natural time for reflection, and the completion of this doctoral dissertation has indeed been a journey. What made the experience particularly meaningful was the way my professional work as an international education leader at a land-grant institution continuously intersected with the themes of this dissertation. Insights from the study often surfaced in my day-to-day responsibilities, just as experiences at work influenced my understanding of the data. On more than one occasion, I found myself recalling the voices of the

study participants when navigating professional challenges, as if they were gentle reminders that, although institutional contexts differ, some of the core dilemmas in internationalization are shared. Looking back, I am struck by how this experience was at once humbling, frustrating, and illuminating—and ultimately deeply rewarding.

Why humbling? I began this journey with more confidence than wisdom. I assumed I could complete a dissertation in the margins of my already full professional and personal life. In hindsight, I was astoundingly naïve. I quickly realized the only way to move forward was to accept that I would fall short in one area or another, depending on the season. Sometimes the dissertation had to wait, and sometimes it took precedence — both choices came with real costs. I also came to appreciate how far-removed doctoral scholarship can feel from my more familiar terrain of administrative problem solving. I applaud those who pursue research as a full-time endeavor. This process required more humility than I initially brought to it.

Why frustrating? Some aspects of the process fell squarely outside my comfort zone. The literature review, for example, demanded extended focus on past theories and debates when my instinct is to look forward and imagine fresh possibilities. Institutional Review Board protocols, methodological design, and literature synthesis all strengthened the study, but required a sustained scholarly discipline that did not come naturally. The frustrations, however, were ultimately productive, and I can now see how each step contributed meaningfully to the rigor of the final product.

Why illuminating? I remain grateful for the candor, time, and trust offered by the SIOs who participated in this study. Their reflections have given me a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the SIO role than I could have gained from professional experience alone. I now recognize that the role is more fragile, contested, and politically situated than I previously

understood. Internationalization, which once enjoyed broad institutional support, is increasingly required to adapt to align with shifting institutional priorities. The recent political environment, including the Trump Administration's antagonism toward higher education, research, and global engagement, appears to undermine the SIO's scope and authority further. These insights were both sobering and deeply informative.

Why rewarding? Despite these challenges, I remain optimistic. History suggests periods of retrenchment are followed by renewed commitment to global engagement and higher learning. Another season of international openness will come, and when it does, institutions will need thoughtful, experienced leaders to guide their global efforts. I hope this dissertation contributes, even in a small way, to that inevitable future. Completing this project after more than 8 years of work has changed me. It has deepened my understanding of international education leadership, sharpened my sense of purpose, and strengthened my resolve to serve the field. That, in itself, is a worthy reward.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This study explored how SIOs at U.S. land-grant institutions lead internationalization efforts amid institutional complexity and evolving external pressures. Through interviews with 15 participants, I presented five interrelated themes that illuminate the multidimensional scope of the SIO role, the contextual and often constrained nature of their authority, and the strategic actions they employ to advance internationalization in imperfect conditions. Rather than acting from a position of broad strategic control, SIOs advance internationalization through coalition building, alignment with institutional priorities, opportunistic decision making, and a consistent awareness of contextual realities. This chapter provided implications for scholarship, for practice, and provided many recommendations for future research. I shared additional reflections

on the implications of this study in the context of the current Trump administration, as well as personal reflections of my dissertation journey.

In closing, this dissertation invites ongoing reflection and dialogue about what internationalization is, what it is becoming, and what it can realistically be. It is not a call for diminished ambition, but rather a recognition that meaningful and durable progress often occurs through small, intentional steps grounded in institutional context, shaped by external conditions, and carried forward by leaders who remain committed to the values and practice of global engagement.

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APPENDIX A: LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AS OF 1862

Land-grant Institutions in the United States as of 1862 (NIFA, n.d.)

ALABAMA -- Auburn University, Auburn
ALASKA -- University of Alaska, Fairbanks
AMERICAN SAMOA -- American Samoa Community College, Pago Pago
ARIZONA -- University of Arizona, Tucson
ARKANSAS -- University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
CALIFORNIA -- University of California System, Oakland as Headquarters, Oakland
COLORADO -- Colorado State University, Fort Collins
CONNECTICUT -- University of Connecticut, Storrs
DELAWARE -- University of Delaware, Newark
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA -- University of the District of Columbia, Washington
FLORIDA -- University of Florida, Gainesville
GEORGIA -- University of Georgia, Athens
GUAM -- University of Guam, Mangilao
HAWAII -- University of Hawaii, Honolulu
IDAHO -- University of Idaho, Moscow
ILLINOIS -- University of Illinois, Urbana
INDIANA -- Purdue University, West Lafayette
IOWA -- Iowa State University, Ames
KANSAS -- Kansas State University, Manhattan
KENTUCKY -- University of Kentucky, Lexington
LOUISIANA -- Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge
MAINE -- University of Maine, Orono
MARYLAND -- University of Maryland, College Park
MASSACHUSETTS -- University of Massachusetts, Amherst
MICHIGAN -- Michigan State University, East Lansing
MICRONESIA -- College of Micronesia, Kolonia, Pohnpei
MINNESOTA -- University of Minnesota, St. Paul
MISSISSIPPI -- Mississippi State University, Starkville
MISSOURI -- University of Missouri, Columbia
MONTANA -- Montana State University, Bozeman
NEBRASKA -- University of Nebraska, Lincoln
NEVADA -- University of Nevada, Reno
NEW HAMPSHIRE -- University of New Hampshire, Durham
NEW JERSEY -- Rutgers University, New Brunswick
NEW MEXICO -- New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
NEW YORK -- Cornell University, Ithaca
NORTH CAROLINA -- North Carolina State University, Raleigh
NORTH DAKOTA -- North Dakota State University, Fargo
NORTHERN MARIANAS -- Northern Marianas College, Saipan, CM
OHIO -- Ohio State University, Columbus

OKLAHOMA -- Oklahoma State University, Stillwater
OREGON -- Oregon State University, Corvallis
PENNSYLVANIA -- Pennsylvania State University, University Park
PUERTO RICO -- University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez
RHODE ISLAND -- University of Rhode Island, Kingston
SOUTH CAROLINA -- Clemson University, Clemson
SOUTH DAKOTA -- South Dakota State University, Brookings
TENNESSEE -- University of Tennessee, Knoxville
TEXAS -- Texas A&M University, College Station
UTAH -- Utah State University, Logan
VERMONT -- University of Vermont, Burlington
VIRGIN ISLANDS -- University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix
VIRGINIA -- Virginia Tech, Blacksburg
WASHINGTON -- Washington State University, Pullman
WEST VIRGINIA -- West Virginia University, Morgantown
WISCONSIN -- University of Wisconsin, Madison
WYOMING -- University of Wyoming Laramie, WY

APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Email Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear NAME,

My name is Chad Hoseth. I am a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University and the Assistant Vice Provost for International Affairs at CSU.

I am writing this e-mail to invite you to serve as a participant in a qualitative research study on leadership of higher education internationalization. The title of my study is *A Qualitative Study Exploring How Senior International Officers Shape Internationalization Strategy at U.S. Land-Grant Institutions*. My study explores how Senior International Officers at land-grant institutions formulate and implement internationalization initiatives while navigating complex challenges and diverse priorities within the institution and worldwide. I am inviting current and recent Senior International Officers at land-grant institutions in the United States who have held the SIO role for at least two years to participate in this study.

The time commitment will be 90 minutes. If you agree to participate, we will schedule one Zoom-based interview between the two of us at a time of your choosing. The interview will involve open-ended questions about your background and your role as a Senior International Officer, your priorities for internationalization at your institution, your assessment of campus support for your priorities, the impact of fiscal challenges in your work, the external challenges that impact your work, and how you navigate these circumstances as the Senior International Officer.

All data collected during the study will be handled as confidentially as possible. If the results of this study are published or presented, individual names, institutions, and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

My advisor is Dra. Susana Muñoz, an Associate Professor in the School of Education at CSU. The Colorado State University Institutional Research Board approved this study. If you have questions, please contact me at chad.hoseth@colostate.edu or by phone at 1-970-556-3920.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Chad Hoseth

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FORM

Consent to Participate in Research Form

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Chad Hoseth. I am a graduate student at Colorado State University working with my faculty advisor, Dra. Susana Muñoz, in the School of Education. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which examines the Senior International Officers at land-grant institutions in the United States and how they navigate internal and external pressures while advancing their internationalization strategic priorities.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct *one interview* with you at a time of your choice. We will conduct the interview over Zoom. The interview will involve questions about your background and your role as a Senior International Officer, your priorities for internationalization at your institution, your assessment of campus support for your priorities, the impact of fiscal challenges in your work, the external challenges that impact your work, and how you navigate (navigated) these circumstances as the Senior International Officer. The interview should last about 90 minutes. I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. The recording is to record the information you provide accurately and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I regret that you cannot participate in this study. You can stop the interview anytime if you do not wish to continue.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. However, the research hopes to benefit current and future Senior International Officers by exploring the challenges

internationalization leaders face when developing and implementing strategic internationalization goals.

Risks and Discomforts

The anticipated risk or discomfort from participating in this interview is minimal. However, there is a commitment of time. Additionally, some topics may delve into sensitive areas, including financial pressures, political pressures, personnel issues, global and geopolitical pressures, memories of the COVID era, and other topics that may trigger negative emotions. If any research questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to or to stop the interview at any time.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, I will take precautions to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If the results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. Unidentifiable codes will be established for institutions, and pseudonyms will be used throughout this study. I will conduct semistructured interviews over Zoom, a standard meeting virtual platform that became commonplace during the COVID era. To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will store the interviews' audio and video files in a password-protected One Drive cloud-based account. I will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as possible after the interview, using Temi, a password-protect AI-enabled transcription tool commonly used by qualitative researchers, and delete recordings when transcription is complete. When the research is complete, I will save the transcripts and other study data for possible use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for 36 months after the study is over. The

same measures described above will be taken to protect the confidentiality of this study data. We may be asked to share the research files with the sponsor or the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee for auditing purposes.

Compensation

You will not be paid to take part in this study.

Rights

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop participating in the project anytime. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer any questions or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at 1-970-556-3920 or *chad.hoseth@colostate.edu*.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 970-491-1553 or e-mail CSU_IRB@colostate.edu.

Participant Consent

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and voluntarily wish to participate in this research. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing four pages.

Signature of participant

Date

Name of participant

Signature of person providing information

Date

Name of person providing information

Do you consent to your interview being audiotaped?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and provide the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant's Name (*please print*)

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D: SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Semistructured Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this qualitative research study on developing internationalization strategies in the face of internal stakeholder pressures and external global challenges. My name is Chad Hoseth, and I use he/him pronouns. I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership Program at Colorado State University.

This study is being completed for my dissertation in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy degree requirements. My motivation to complete this study is shaped by my experience as a higher education practitioner and leader of campus internationalization at Colorado State University.

I am eager to talk with you about how you have shaped internationalization strategies as a leader at your institution. We will start with introductory information and your priorities for campus internationalization. We will then turn to your campus, with particular attention to your assessment of campus support or impediments you have faced. I am particularly interested in how fiscal issues at your campus have impacted your ability to implement your internationalization vision. Finally, we will turn to external pressures, including geopolitical issues, general political issues, economic issues, reflections from COVID-19, and other issues that come to mind for you. I will record our conversation so I can review it later, transcribe it, and analyze it. If you prefer, you are welcome to turn off your camera and use only audio.

Today's interview will be semistructured, meaning I have questions prepared to guide our discussion; however, we will construct this conversation together. Please share with me what you

believe is relevant to your experiences leading internationalization. I wish to understand your experiences in your own words without imposing my own, so I may ask for more details on what words mean to you from time to time. Please let me know if you need me to repeat or reword any questions for clarity. You may also decline to answer any questions you do not wish to address.

To support de-identifying the data, I invite you to select a pseudonym for me to refer to you in the data collection and study write-up. What would you like me to refer to you as?

[Participant shares pseudonym; if participant declines pseudonym, I will assign a pseudonym for data management purposes.]

As reminder, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Do you have any questions?
[I address any questions.]

Do I have your permission to begin recording?
[I will affirm that their response matches the response supplied on their informed consent form. If yes, I will begin recording; if no, I will arrange to take extensive notes during the interview].

Semistructured Interview Questions and Topics

[Please note that questions will be appropriately adjusted for participants who are former SIOs.]

Introductory information

I am eager to learn more about you.

- What is your current title? And what are your areas of responsibility?
- How long have you been in this role? How long have you been at this institution?
- What are some of your personal qualities or characteristics that are salient and important to you?
- As the Senior International Officer, what is going well for you and your international team right now?

- What are some of your biggest challenges right now?
- What are your most essential internationalization goals and intended outcomes?

Internal issues

I want to learn a bit about your campus and the level of support for your internationalization efforts.

- How would you describe the level of awareness and commitment to internationalization across your campus?
- What about from the President and Provost?
- In what ways does your campus embrace your internationalization priorities?
- In what ways do you experience the campus not sharing your specific goals, and what are some possible reasons that describe why those goals are not shared?
- To what extent has a formal strategic plan, either at the institutional or division level, been helpful in advancing internationalization?
- What other tools have you found particularly helpful in advancing your internationalization agenda?
- If you could change one thing on your campus to improve the state of campus commitment to internationalization, what would that be?
- Do you have any final reflections on this specific topic?

Fiscal issues

As many institutions face financial pressures, I want to touch on fiscal issues.

- To what extent are you expected to generate revenue as a primary element of your internationalization efforts? Can you share a couple of examples to illustrate your response?

- To what extent are resources being reduced, thereby impeding your institution's ability to realize its internationalization goals?
- What tools have you found particularly helpful in advancing internationalization in the face of fiscal issues that your institution may face?
- If you could change one thing regarding this general topic of financial challenges, what would that be?
- Do you have any final reflections on this topic?

External issues

Finally, the work of campus internationalization is situated in a global context, and we live in a complex world right now.

- As you think about issues or circumstances beyond your campus, perhaps at the local, national, or global level, and particularly issues that might impede your internationalization efforts, what are some issues or circumstances that immediately come to mind? *[Note the issues they list and refer to in the following questions.]*
- Issue #1
 - Please describe the issue in more detail.
 - How does this issue affect you, and what can you do to advance your goals despite this issue?
- Issue #2
 - If required, please describe the issue in more detail.
 - How does this issue affect you, and what can you do to advance your goals despite this issue?
- [Repeat, as needed]

- If you could change one thing regarding this general topic of external challenges, what would that be?
- Do you have any final reflections on this topic?

Concluding questions

We are almost done. I have a few final questions for you.

- We have discussed your internationalization goals and how internal and external challenges can impact them. Of everything we have discussed, what stands out to you as a particularly challenging or troublesome issue that may have a long-term impact on your ability to implement your internationalization plans?
- If you were talking with a trusted friend who was just about to start an SIO role at a different land-grant institution, what advice would you give them based on our conversation today?
- What gives you optimism about the future of internationalization in higher education or on your campus?
- Do you have any final reflections you want to share with me?

Thank you so much for your time. This concludes our interview. Do you have any questions for me?

[I address any questions.]

If you have any questions about the study in the future, please e-mail me. I will continue data analysis and present the findings in my dissertation, which I hope to complete in 2025. Once it is published, I will share the completed document with you by e-mail.