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# Beyond NAFSA: An Assessment of Professional Development Needs of Secondary-Level International Education Professionals

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BEYOND NAFSA: AN ASSESSMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF  
SECONDARY-LEVEL INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

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PIM 73

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## ABSTRACT

For many professionals, attending a conference or workshop offered by a professional organization is a logical course of action. These resources help to expand knowledge of a field, improve performance at work and connect those who share interests. Almost every field has an organization or association of some sort that offers these type of professional development opportunities for individuals seeking to learn and grow in their work. However, high school level International Education professionals struggle to find this type of resource.

As an emerging subset of International Education, the field of international high school student advising is in need of a representative professional organization. More and more students are choosing to travel from abroad to the United States for their high school education. The professionals who work with these students need guidance to ensure they are able to provide the best possible support.

Interviews with high school International Educators in Connecticut and Massachusetts were conducted. The data collected provided insight into the current professional development needs of those in this field. These needs included a range of issues that should be addressed by professional organizations, including integrating international students, providing teacher trainings, increasing cultural sensitivity, curricular development, and third party accreditation. This study concludes by offering a set of guidelines for further opportunities.

## **Introduction**

For many professionals, attending a conference or workshop is a straightforward way to expand their knowledge, improve performance at work and meet others with similar interests. Almost every field has an organization or association of some sort that offers these type of professional development opportunities for individuals seeking to learn and grow in their work. Many of these groups are well-known: psychologists can join the American Psychological Association (APA); many lawyers are members of the American Bar Association (ABA); physicians and medical students have the opportunity to participate in the American Medical Association (AMA). Each of these prestigious groups offer their members countless resources and opportunities to connect to one another, and improve their skills.

Practitioners of International Education (IE) have several professional organizations which they can also choose to join. The most prominent group in this field, by far, is NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA). This organization offers its members a wide range of resources that help professionals excel in this field. The national conference, held annually, is widely attended, as are their regional meetings and workshops across the country. NAFSA's online resources are extensive as well: the website catalogues case studies, government documents, research publications, press releases, news stories, statistics and data, stories and videos, all available for members' use (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2015a). Other organizations exist as well, but none provide for International Educators as thoroughly as NAFSA.

The benefits of joining any of the hundreds of professional associations are clear: they help both novice and practiced professionals enhance their networks, broaden their knowledge and take charge of their career (Cherwin, 2014). These resources are great tools, when they

directly apply to an individual's work. If there is not a direct correlation to one's career, however, it may not make sense to join these groups. Annual memberships can carry a hefty fee, conferences and travel are expensive and time consuming, and there is always a risk that the resources may only be peripherally related to one's career.

For International Educators working in secondary schools, this is very often the case: even given the wide range of organizations that are available, none of them directly apply to their daily work life. These professionals play important roles in American high schools with international programs: they oversee international student life, programming, admissions, host family management, academic support, immigration processing, and more. Many of these administrators choose not to join NAFSA, as the majority of the organization's offerings focus on areas of the field not related to their jobs. The organization was originally founded "to promote the professional development of U.S. college and university officials responsible for assisting and advising the 25,000 foreign students who had come to study in the United States after World War II." It then kept expanding to include administrators who "played an important role in helping foreign students acclimate to U.S. college communities" (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2015b). Since the beginning, its focus has been on international exchange at the college and university level.

As NAFSA grew, the organization continued to follow the college and university path, and expanded extensively in that direction. When high school exchange programs began to appear, they were welcomed to join the group and utilize the resources that were available. However, the organization has yet to provide resources that target high schools specifically.

As an entry-level professional, I felt this inclination while searching for job postings, networking opportunities and resources to advance my own career. The offerings from NAFSA

were all geared toward positions at colleges and universities. I was able to find certain resources - namely, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) job board - which I did find useful. However, this was only when I used advanced searches and specific search. There were no sites or organizations with resources specifically geared toward independent schools with international student programs. My search for workshops, webinars, and other professional development offerings in this field was similarly unfruitful. Living in an area surrounded by independent schools with International Programs, I had expected to find a much more extensive list of resources for the people doing what I wanted to do.

This study uses the research process to examine whether or not current professionals believe that NAFSA and other existing IE professional organizations provide sufficient professional development opportunities needed to support those who work with students at the high school level. This investigation builds on the conceptual theories surrounding the professionalization and structuration of professional fields, and the important role that associations and organizations play in this process. I was conducted interviews with currently practicing International Program administrators at high schools to discern their perspective on the availability of professional development resources. From these discussions, I was able to determine what opportunities currently exist for secondary-level International Education practitioners, what is and is not useful, and, most importantly, what they would like to see available in the future.



## Literature Review

### Role of Professional Organizations in the Development of a Field

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) define an organizational field as “sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute an area of institutional life...[They are the] key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (p. 148). Organizational, or professional, fields therefore encompass a wide range of individuals and organizations that participate in a particular set of professional activities.

There is a wide range of literature addressing the common patterns in which professional fields develop; this process is called professionalization. One of the most prominent organizational theorists, Andrew Abbott (1988), studied professionalization by analyzing the “evolution and interrelations of professions and, more generally, the ways occupational groups control knowledge and skill” (p. 8). In observing the ways in which professions interact, he was able to determine some of the key factors which establish a field as unique. He noted that as these groups evolve, professionals belonging to any given field will coalesce into a group, which typically results in the formation of some type of association, training school or other governing body which can determine membership rules to “exclude the unqualified” (Abbott, 1988, p. 11). This first step leads to many others, including the evolution of state or federal licensing legislation, professional examinations, university-based professional education and ethics codes, and ultimately results in a widely recognized, legitimized profession.

Other theorists study the establishment of new professions through a process they call ‘structuration.’ In the realm of organizational theory, structuration is the process of establishing a

field, or creating 'structure,' and legitimizing the boundaries that define it. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), structuration is largely understood to have four steps: an increase in the interaction among individuals in a field, the creation of inter-organizational hierarchical structures and ways of working together, an increase in the information and resources available within a field, and the development of an awareness of what constitutes professional norms within their field (p. 148).

The theories of professionalization and structuration demonstrate the crucial role of professional associations in the process of establishing a new professional field. Thomas Lawrence (1999) argues that, to gain "legitimacy in an organizational field...[a profession must have] practical rules that respond to at least two questions: 'Where can I go?;' and, 'What can I do?'" (p. 165). To answer "where can I go?" a field must have "institutionalized boundaries which delimit our entry into particular forms of life," which result from clear rules of membership to define who belongs and who does not belong within a certain organizational field (Lawrence, 1999, p. 165). Formalized membership within a field is important, as it makes it possible to establish who is "in" and who is "out." Professional development organizations are an effective method of establishing and enforcing these membership rules. Equally as important, these organized groups allow members to clearly identify themselves to others. This establishes the field as legitimate in the wider world of professional possibilities. In acting as "negotiating or representative agencies, shaping and redefining appropriate practices of interaction for their respective memberships, [professional associations] act as the means whereby communities represent themselves to others in the field" and to the rest of the world (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002, 62).

In order to respond to the question “what can I do?” a field should establish clear standards of practice for those practitioners wishing to participate in the field. These standards “provide guidelines, norms and legal prescriptions relating to how practices are to be carried out” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 165). Once again, professional associations play a crucial role in establishing this legitimizing factor. By offering trainings, workshops, conferences, and bringing practitioners together in broader discussion of the field, these associations have significant ability to disseminate standards of practice and instruct their members on what to expect and how to perform within the field.

Once established, professional organizations also have an important task in enforcing these standards of practice. As a field forms, these professional “associations monitor compliance with...sanctioned expectations” (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002, p. 61-62). This compliance is continuously reinforced through training, education, hiring and certification, [and] ceremonies of celebration (Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002, p. 61-62). In ensuring that members of a field are held accountable, professional organizations provide a solid platform on which an emerging field can be built.

Professional associations also create a space for practitioners to influence the future and trajectory of their field. The training, knowledge and connections that an individual stands to gain as a member of a professional association will help them understand the field as a whole. Gaining this “big picture” perspective “will enable...practitioners to better plot a course for the future of their field” (Wiseman & Matherly, 2009, p. 335). Any given profession is constantly evolving, and it is important to provide individuals with an outlet to influence and steer the continuation of their work as it shifts.

Not only do these associations provide important benefits to the field at large - they can also act as “valuable social functions for those who are like-minded and similarly employed...Participation in a professional body is a step toward defining one’s professional self” (Markova, Ford, Dickson & Bohn, 2013, p. 493). By choosing to join these groups, individuals and institutions who practice the same craft and possess the same skills are able to come together to gain membership benefits like professional development, career advancement, important networking connections and broadening knowledge about a particular subject. The collective effect of coming together as professionals creates a synergy that is larger than the power of one individual (Cherwin, 2014).

### **Survey of Existing Organizations in Secondary-level IE**

Secondary level international student advising, an emerging field itself, is in in the midst of its own structuration process. As this field moves through these steps, it is likely that the need for a professional association which provides these important functions will arise. Such an organization would be a way for practitioners to formally establish an effective system of meaning, to connect to one another, to represent themselves to outside professionals, and to enforce compliance with mutually agreed upon expectations.

There are several existing organizations which provide some, but not all, of these functions for international student advisors. Many professionals have utilized these groups out of necessity - particularly those new to the field, who are searching for any resources that will help guide them in beginning their careers. Others have utilized these offerings tangentially, needing to adapt the information to apply to their own work. It is important to understand what professional organizations currently exist, in order to comprehend where in the process of professionalization the field stands and what still needs to be done to provide for the future.

There are several national organizations, regional and specialized organizations, as well as third-party consulting businesses that secondary IE professionals can choose to utilize right now.

**National Organizations.** NAFSA (the Association for International Educators) is the first related group to which many people refer when discussing professional IE organizations. However, their offerings are primarily geared toward higher education international programs, and only provide for secondary programs on a peripheral level with more general guidance - for instance, advising high school counselors on assisting their students apply to college, or helping international students transition between high school and university. The specialized sub-groups geared toward high school administrators that do exist are unorganized and frequently remain inactive: they may have an informal meeting at a conference, or maintain a listserv, but neither of these opportunities are seen as useful nor are they well-managed in the long run.

The Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET) is another important organization in the field of International Education. This organization accredits high school level exchange programs, and provides important guidance on the standards and best practices for how these programs should function (Council on Standards for International Educational Travel, 2015). However, CSIET does not accredit institutions of high school education - only the third party programs these schools partner with, who offer services such as host family recruitment, new student recruitment, marketing and communication. CSIET is solely an accrediting institution, which also means they do not offer any professional development opportunities to the groups which they do accredit.

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS) are both important organizations that sponsor important opportunities for secondary school level practitioners. As international programs tend to be housed within

either independent schools or boarding schools (as opposed to public or charter schools), the professional development opportunities from these organizations are fairly relevant. Modeled after TABS' first Global Symposium in 2012, this partnership has offered an annual Global Symposium since 2014 (Breault, 2014). This conference helps educators prepare "global citizenship in a world increasingly interconnected economically, environmentally, culturally, and politically" (TABS-NAIS, 2014). This national meeting has proved useful for many International Education practitioners, but on a more holistic level of their practice. NAIS and TABS tend to address issues that exist on a school-wide basis, not at the level of the International Program. These groups still fail to acknowledge the particular professional development needs of the International Education professional.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is another prominent organization in the field of IE. Their annual Open Doors report, which is widely reputed to be the primary source of data and scholarship regarding the exchange of education across borders, does not include any information on high school students: the academic level of study participants begins at the Associate's Level, and continues up through graduate students (Institute of International Education, 2014). In general, data regarding high school exchange is very difficult to find - even in researching this study, it was difficult to find sources to answer such questions as "how many international students are currently studying in the United States?" or "how many certified high schools currently enroll international students?"

**Regional Organizations.** There are several regional associations that practitioners have found useful. There is an abundance of independent high schools and boarding schools in New England in particular. Because of this prevalence, many formal and informal groups have naturally sprung up between schools, which in themselves serve as professional development

organizations. Many of the schools in the area are historical high schools and have housed international programs for many years. Professionals at these schools have developed natural partnerships with their counterparts nearby, in order to share experiences and expertise within this niche profession. One group, which includes the Gunnery in Washington, CT, the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT, as well as a few others, meets annually in June at a central location to discuss ongoing issues at their schools (Thompson, personal communication, February 20, 2015; Theobald, personal communication, February 9, 2015). They also maintain an online listserv throughout the year. The Notre Dame Academy in Hingham, MA has formed a partnership with Boston College High School in Boston, MA to share tips on navigating the expanding demands of the field of International Education (Cabral, personal communication, February 6, 2015). Each of these groups are highly effective in improving the performance of International Programs at the member institutions, but fail to extend these benefits to the rest of the field.

**Specialized Organizations.** The Global Education Benchmarking Group (GEBG) is a highly specialized organization that collects data on International Education trends at all levels. Many professionals have become members of this association, as it provides important perspective on the “big picture” within secondary level international programs. GEBG is working on initiatives such as creating a Global Learning Handbook, collecting national and global education accreditation standards, and conducting a national student assessment survey (Global Education Benchmarking Group, 2014). They also provide substantial professional development opportunities for faculty and administrators, but only those at member schools.

Many practitioners of IE at the high school level - especially at institutions who are just establishing their international programs, as it is initially difficult to define the scope of these roles - have a range of responsibilities within their schools. For instance, many International

Coordinators also teach ESL (English as a Second Language) courses. ESL overall is a relatively well-established field, and there are many professional organizations that help serve teachers and administrators in this area.

Many professionals who work with high school international students are housed within their school's Office of Admissions. Particularly at higher-caliber boarding schools and private day schools, the International Admissions aspect of these programs is by far and away the highest institutional priority. Many of these professionals have found it useful to join associations which specialize in professional development for admissions officers.

**Cultural consulting businesses.** There are various for-profit organizations which sponsor high school international exchange programs which also offer professional development opportunities, though typically only to their employees. Some examples of these organizations which function at the national level are the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE), the Experiment in International Living (EIL - housed within the World Learning umbrella), the American Field Service (AFS) and others. These companies are often able to provide more specialized trainings for their employees. However, these professional development opportunities are not open to the general public.

Noting the trends in secondary-level IE, several private consulting firms have been created to address the needs of international students studying in the United States. There are several groups in this vein which specialize in Chinese cultural trainings, and providing trainings on how to work with this specific group. The large majority of international students are from this country, so this specialization has proven to be particularly profitable.

A prominent example of these businesses is Fox Intercultural Consulting, which “promotes intercultural understanding between the United States and China through a diverse



range of educational and cultural programs” (Fox Intercultural Consulting, 2015). They provide trainings and other services for member schools, but are very expensive and not available to the general public.

### **Expansion of Secondary-level IE**

International education at the college and university level has been a well-established field for many years. Students have been participating in international exchange for decades. One of the first organizations promoting these programs, the Experiment in International Living, was established by Dr. Donald Watt in 1932, who took a group of 23 high school boys to Switzerland to encourage cultural exchange (Experiment in International Living [EIL], 2015). An important milestone in these exchanges occurred when the United States Congress passed the Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948. This created an informational exchange “to promote better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations,” and paved the way for thousands of students to come from abroad and study in this country (Maghzi, para. 1, 2004).

More recently, students have been choosing to come from abroad at the high school level. The fixation on English education and the growing middle class in East Asian countries has resulted in an explosion of Chinese, Korean and Taiwanese students coming to the United States to receive a high school education -- in fact, “last year American schools welcomed 50 times more Chinese students than they did just eight years ago” (Van Sant, para. 6, 2014). Overall, the number of students coming from around the world is rising. According to the SEVP quarterly report, published in July 2014, the number of active students and exchange visitors increased eight percent between July 2013 and the time of publication (U.S. Immigration & Customs

Enforcement, 2014). There are now over 1.11 million international students enrolled in credit-bearing degree programs at all levels (from secondary up to doctoral) in the United States.

According to recent trends, there has been a huge push for these students to travel from abroad at an earlier age. As colleges become more and more competitive, students hope to gain an advantage by spending time in-country, in order to improve their English skills and become familiar with American culture before applying to an American college or university (Hopkins, 2012). The motivation to earn an education in this country is largely motivated by academic concerns: students examine high schools' past SAT scores and college acceptance listings, and strive to attend the schools that appear the most prestigious, mostly private, schools (Marklein, 2014). This trend is becoming more and more well-established, and more and more students are choosing to follow this path.

This increase in the number of students indicates that the number of high schools certified to admit these students - and, therefore, the number of administrative staff and faculty required to support them - is on the rise. There are approximately 8,976 SEVP-certified schools, at all levels, in the United States (U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2014). As the number of professionals in demand rises, the demand for a regulated, legitimate, organization to contribute to the field increases as well. This study will contribute important information that will be useful in determining how to best support these professionals in the future.

## **Research Design**

The goal of this study was to determine what types of professional development opportunities exist, and to assess whether or not these offerings were sufficient to satisfy the needs of high school level International Education (IE) professionals. To do this, I conducted detailed interviews with practicing professionals to determine what offerings they had utilized,

and what they would like to see available. From these findings, I was able to create a set of detailed guidelines for a professional development organization that would sufficiently provide for these individuals.

### **Culture of Inquiry**

As illustrated in the review of related literature, it is clear that organizations for professional development are important factors in the establishment of a new field. Secondary-level IE is one such emerging field. In order to understand what this type of professional development organization would entail for high school IE professionals, I elected to conduct a needs assessment of current professionals in the field. I wanted to analyze what professional development opportunities are currently available, what types of opportunities individuals are taking advantage of, and most importantly, what types of opportunities these individuals would like to see available in the future.

It was clear that in-depth interviews with currently practicing professionals in the field would elicit the most relevant data to answer this question. Through these conversations, I, as the researcher, would be able to gather information on all aspects of their experiences working with international high school students. Their perspective on the current status of the field, and the actions they have taken as professionals, are invaluable in establishing what is needed for the field to progress and, therefore, in answering my research question. As complex individuals, the participants' various perspectives "cannot be understood unless the meaning that [they] assign to them is [also] understood" along with their "thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds" on the subject (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). The only way to divulge this information is through a free-flowing interpersonal conversation, hence the reason I chose to conduct interviews for my study, as opposed to a more quantitative data approach.

## Data Collection

In order to collect information regarding the various perspectives on this question, I interviewed 21 individuals, all of whom work directly with international students at area high schools. For this study, I am defining “international students” as students studying in the United States who possess a foreign passport and are here on either a J-1 or F-1 visa.

**Interview Participants.** The high schools which employed the interview participants were all private, independent day or boarding schools, located in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Every school has both American and foreign students who interact on a daily basis.

I found interview participants by researching which schools in the area are SEVP (Student & Exchange Visitor Program)-certified by the United States Department of Homeland Security. All of their certified schools are listed in their online database (Department of Homeland Security, 2014). After generating a list of all potential schools in my designated geographic area, I researched who their International Program administrator would be. Most of this information I could find online, but some institutions required a phone call to discern the best person to contact at their institution.

There was a range of job titles among the participants, and organizational structure among the schools, which participated in these interviews. The majority of the professionals had titles similar to “International Student Coordinator,” “Director of International Student Program,” or “Diversity Coordinator.” Some of the schools housed their international student program administrators in their Admissions office, so these individuals’ titles were either “Director of International Admissions” or “International Admissions counselor.” Still other schools housed their international programs within the ESL (English as a Second Language) or

foreign language department at their institution. If this was the case, then the primary administrator at this school was likely the “Director of ESL” or an ESL teacher. A full list of interview participants, including title, school and ‘boarding’ vs. ‘day’ designation can be found in Appendix A.

**Interview Strategy.** All of the interviews were conducted on the phone, to eliminate the need for me to schedule travel time to and from the schools, which were scattered throughout a large geographic area. At the time of the interview, I was located at either my home or my office so I was able to take notes directly on the computer during the conversation. These notes were extremely thorough, and included all relevant information that would be needed during the data analysis process. Because I was able to take such detailed notes, this eliminated the need to transcribe any recorded interviews in order to conduct my data analysis. None of the questions asked were of a sensitive nature, so there was no concern with maintaining anonymity among the responses. Each participant gave their consent by email, in the form of acknowledging the research study and then scheduling an interview slot.

While we talked, I asked the interview participants about their institutions and the particular international program with which they work. This allowed me to gain perspective on how the schools have structured their program, and on what their institutional priorities are. It was very useful to see how people responded, as most participants launched into a discussion of what they are currently working on in terms of programming and policy implementation.

I then asked about any professional memberships the participant currently holds, has held in the past, and any professional development opportunities they have taken advantage of in the past. This led to interesting discussion illuminating the offerings that are available; I learned about several that I am hoping to personally utilize in my own career.

Following this discussion, I asked about any further opportunities the participants would like to see available. In many instances, the participant reflected on a question or issue that had already come up in the conversation and expressed a desire to see a formalized, professional network that would provide a platform for developing a solution or answer to the stated concern. As a follow up, I also asked whether or not a new organization would be useful, or if they could see their suggested professional development opportunities existing within a currently functional organization. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

### **Data Analysis**

The questions I asked of participants were meant to elicit conversation surrounding their work on a daily basis, and how they felt they could best improve the efficiency of their programs overall. This line of inquiry resulted in a wide range of responses which reflected the individual's, and the institution's, professional development priorities for their international program.

Once the interviews were completed, I wrote each of the participants' responses on an index card and color-coded them according to categories of concern. Once this data had been coded into these topics, I was able to condense the information into categories which illustrated the most prominent issues that the participants requested be addressed by professional development offerings. These categories included: resources to learn techniques to better integrate international students into the larger school community, providing trainings to teachers and staff to help students adjust to the American education system, and learning new ways of increasing sensitivity to new and different cultures on campus. Among ESL instructors, there was a clear demand for developing a standardized curriculum and evaluation guidelines.

## **Research Limitations**

All studies have limitations, and this is no exception. One of the most prominent weaknesses of this study was the fact that the participant interviews were conducted over the phone. It was necessary to conduct interviews in this manner, as the participants were located across a wide geographical area and it would have been difficult for me to travel in person to each individual's location. The lack of face-to-face interaction, however, limited my observations strictly to the participant's spoken responses: there was no implied content, in the form of body language, facial expression, environmental factors, etc.

Another limitation is the fact that I focused my participant recruitment in such a limited geographic area. It was necessary to do so, as time constraints again limited my ability to speak to every high school international student administrator in the country. However, there was a much larger sample size that could have been utilized, which could have vastly increased the analysis material for my study.

If I were to conduct this study on a larger scale, by including more participants from other areas, I would be required to utilize a secondary coder to conduct my data analysis. For this study, I coded my interview response data on my own, with no other input to reinforce my findings. Including a separate analysis from another coder would greatly increase the replicability and validity of this study. Another clear improvement would be to add a survey or other data collection method. Including a survey would have provided triangulation of the data and further validated the study results.

There is a possibility that the pool of participants was slightly skewed, which would greatly affect the outcome of the data. The individuals who responded to my recruitment efforts, and therefore participated in my interviews, were potentially predisposed to doing so because

they are frustrated with the field as it currently exists. Thus, the data as presented in this study may not be representative of the professionals working in the field as a whole.

## **Needs Assessment**

### **Participant Memberships**

The most common membership among interview participants was the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and The Association of Boarding Schools (TABS). As discussed in the literature review chapter, these two organizations have formed a productive partnership and now offer an annual Global Symposium for their members. Seven out of 21 participants, or 33%, have attended or are planning to attend this conference. Those who have attended reported that it has been very helpful in the past.

Only three interviewees have participated in NAFSA events before; one said she attended the annual conference once but did not find it helpful, so chose not to renew her membership. One respondent said she has actually found her NAFSA membership useful, as it provides good training on immigration and good professional development (despite its clear leanings toward higher education). She also reported using several NAFSA pamphlets and resources for her students, after she adapted them to be applicable to a high school level (K. Olah, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Also discussed in the literature review chapter were regional networks of schools that have been useful. Three participants who work in the state of Connecticut are members of the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS). One professional was a member of the Association of Independent Schools in New England (AISNE) and one was a member of the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England (ISANNE). These memberships



were mostly school-sponsored, however. These participants did not report that any of these organizations had been particularly useful to their own professional development needs.

One resource that had proved useful to a very specific area of need for international education professionals was courses at International Education Training Services (IETS). This organization offers trainings, workshops and other resources that specifically address questions regarding high school student immigration, SEVIS-training and government regulations.

**Specialized Memberships.** Many ESL teacher respondents claimed membership in differing organizations that help them address their needs, including Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the state-specific iterations of this national group: Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages (MATSOL) and Connecticut Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CT TESOL).

Several schools' Diversity Officers were interviewed as well. These professionals were members of a range of conferences helping them address their specific professional development needs, including the People of Color Conference, offered by NAIS, and the National Association for Multicultural Programs.

Other specialized groups were mentioned, which address issues more geared toward particular schools' unique student bodies. These included several girls' schools which are members of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools and a Christian school who is a member of a national Christian school group.

### **Trends in Responses**

The interview participants included in this study provided extensive information highlighting issues they experience in their work which could be addressed by professional

development programming. There were many trends in these responses, with variations based on each professionals' specific role within their institution, and the type of school itself. The content of these interviews covers the full range of perspectives within the field of secondary-level IE: I spoke to 21 participants, who work in Admissions, ESL (English as a Second Language), student life, academics and International Student Advisors. I also spoke to individuals working at both day and boarding schools, all girls' and all boys' schools, and one Christian school.

One of the most common assertions, across all positions and institutions, was that professionals need help integrating international and American students, both in the classroom and throughout the school community. Many participants referenced their concern that the international students group together during school hours and speak their own language. This is a particular problem at schools with large Asian student populations (J. Cascio, personal communication, February 20, 2015; K. Olah, personal communication, February 9, 2015; M. Conway, personal communication, February 3, 2015). Many schools have implemented specific rules against speaking any languages other than English. It is extremely difficult to enforce these rules, however, and many expressed frustration with the issue.

Furthermore, teachers struggle to integrate the students into the classroom, and American students struggle to include them in their daily activities. Asian education systems are known for prizing memorization and recitation of facts. When these Asian students arrive in the United States, many professionals and teachers struggle to get them to "embrace independent thinking" (K. Theobald, personal communication, February 9, 2015). It is very difficult for teachers to work with international students on many levels: language barriers make it difficult to include them in class discussions, and their reticence to express themselves and participate in class

discussion frequently means they get left behind. Any professional development offerings should be sure to provide workshops and trainings to address this issue.

Interestingly, the professionals working at boarding schools explicitly stated that integration was not an issue. According to one participant, many of the international students have already been attending junior boarding schools, and are therefore very used to, and already adapted to, the residential environment (E. Picciotto, personal communication, February 4, 2015). In addition, boarding schools require their students to participate in more activities than day schools, which brings them into mandated interaction with American students.

Another ‘across-the-board’ response was the desire to assist teachers and other academic mentors and advisors in supporting their international students. It was clear that the support students receive in the classroom is a crucial element of their American experience. However, there is a dearth of training opportunities for teachers, and their support counterparts in International Student offices. One respondent said that there is a “complete lack of support for faculty on how to integrate students into their classrooms...and to help faculty address cultural issues” (A. Friedman, personal communication, February 23, 2015). Another expressed a strong desire to see professional development offerings for teachers to help them integrate international students into their classroom activities (J. Cascio, personal communication, February 20, 2015). In addition, several participants expressed concern for the teachers’ ability to be sensitive to the international students’ needs.

Culture was discussed a good deal in the interviews, regardless of the position and title of the interviewee. Everyone at a school must understand that international students come from a different background. But it is crucial for professionals in this field to acknowledge and be familiar with the nuances in the cultures of their students. This helps professionals guide the

students through American customs, and helps them advocate for the students when issues arise. These issues range from how to pronounce the students' names (Xia is a common Chinese name, but many American high school students would be completely unable to say it out loud), to explaining cultural tendencies the general public may not understand (for instance, Asian students typically interpret social interactions extremely literally). Sometimes, these tendencies cause issues between teachers or host families. For instance, it is rude in many cultures to look elders in the eye. To Americans, however, a lack of eye contact is a sign of disrespect. In the future of the field, it will be very important to disseminate thorough information regarding specific cultures to professionals.

The responses among ESL teacher participants reflected a striking lack of classroom and curricular support. There is no common curriculum, no standardized textbook, nor even clear guidelines as to what benchmarks should be for ESL students. Each school or department is left to determine what its standards and teaching methods will be. If a student transfers schools, it is likely they will have to begin their ESL requirements again. Considering that most international students need English instruction upon their arrival, in addition to other academic subjects, it would be important for any newly developed secondary-level IE organization to address the issue of standardizing curricula. Many ESL teachers also mentioned that they would like to see networking opportunities for ESL professionals - as it stands, they are typically integrated with either other foreign language teachers or not included at all.

One of the biggest questions for any interview participants dealing with international student admissions is their use of third party organizations to recruit and screen students. There are dozens of these businesses that provide such services, but there is no accrediting or overseeing organization to ensure their practices are trustworthy. There are horror stories of

schools utilizing recruitment businesses, and receiving applications from students which were completely false or interviewing students who were only able to answer questions to which they had memorized answers.

## **Professionalization Guidelines**

### **Primary Considerations for Guidelines**

Reflecting back on the theories of structuration, professionalization, and the important role professional organizations play in these processes discussed in the Literature Review chapter, this study demonstrates that the field of secondary-level International Education is in its early stages of development. Professional organizations are very important actors in the professionalization of a field, as they: determine membership, and who is “in” vs. who is “out”; they help disseminate resources among these members, educate them and keep them up to date with field developments; they help members create a sense of “self,” and define their professional personas; and they create a space for practitioners to shape the future of the field.

The findings presented in the Needs Assessment chapter demonstrate that there is a clear demand for more professional development opportunities among high school international administrators. These offerings may well come in the form of a new professional organization for administrators, in order to provide the professionalization this field demands. This study concludes that a new organization would be beneficial for many reasons, but would need to make sure to consider the following guidelines.

### **Demands on Time and Focus**

One big consideration for the development of a new organization is the time constraints on professionals. A total of seven of 21 interview participants referenced a struggle with finding time to not only attend and participate in professional development opportunities, but to research them in the first place. Many of these professionals stated, “I don’t have time to think about professional development” (M. Cabral, personal communication, February 6, 2015), or “I have no time to explore the field” (E. Kise, personal communication, February 5, 2015). One suggested that organizations offer opportunities in the summer, when they have more time to think about non-student related matters and to take advantage of these resources (E. Kleber, personal communication, February 18, 2015).

Many other professionals referenced the wide range of professional organizations that are available, but not having time to attend and take advantage of them all. This is especially true when the existing offerings are not always entirely relevant to their work. One respondent stated “we don’t have time for the ‘forest’ work - we only have time to spend in the trees!” (D. Thompson, personal communication, February 20, 2015). He was clearly implying that the day-to-day demands of working with high school students leaves very little free time or mental energy to pursue other opportunities.

These attitudes are very important to consider if developing a new professional organization for this field. Any new organization must substantially consolidate the professional development offerings available and be extremely relevant. It should be a top priority to address the full range of professionals’ concerns, including each issue discussed in this study’s Needs Assessment chapter (student integration, teacher training, cultural sensitivity, ESL support, and

third-party assessment). This is the only way that busy professionals will choose to utilize any new offering, and voluntarily add more to their already very full plates.

### **Sharing Resources**

It is abundantly clear that there is a wealth of knowledge among the most established, long-standing international programs. The oldest schools in the area, some of which have had international programs for over 50 years, could act as important role models in the professionalization of this field. These schools include The Gunnery, Suffield Academy, the Newman School, Tabor Academy and Hotchkiss. In many cases, these institutions have already implemented their own professional development opportunities: conferences and workshops among their international student counterparts at neighboring schools, listservs for asking and answering common questions, and annual meetings.

They have also begun developing useful programs or initiatives to tackle some of the major questions in the field. One good example of this is the 'Trading Places' course, implemented at Tabor Academy (M. Conway, personal communication, February 3, 2015). This is a semester long course required for all freshmen, taught by international students, to help combat cultural insensitivity and help students integrate into the school. Another example is the 'Bridging the Gap' club, formed by American students at the Newman School. It currently has about 20 members who get together and give presentations about various cultures during lunch. They also plan an annual International Day for the whole school (J. Cascio, personal communication, February 20, 2015).

These schools have well-established international programs, extensive experience in dealing with and supporting international students, and have implemented student support programs which are effective and well-organized. They clearly have substantial resources (in the

form of knowledge and experience) that should be shared with the rest of the field. A formalized networking system would make this possible. Almost half of the 21 interview respondents mentioned the desire for a resource-sharing network, in the form of workshops, discussions or round tables among peers, problem-solving work groups, and resource-sharing networks (be they virtual or in-person).

The word “formalized” was also used frequently among interview participants, in relation to networking opportunities. There are many informal groups that have popped up naturally among peers in regional areas. Hotchkiss - a boarding school in Connecticut - hosts a meeting among many international directors each June (D. Thompson, personal communication, February 20, 2015), there is an email listserv among Massachusetts international advisors (J. Cascio, personal communication, February 20, 2015; M. Tseng, personal communication, February 9, 2015), and several professionals have met to discuss the needs specifically among Chinese students (M. Blunden, personal communication, February 24, 2015; J. Lampe, personal communication, February 4, 2015). However, each of these opportunities was planned haphazardly, by one of the members attending, at inconsistent intervals and in a decentralized location. The interview participants adamantly expressed that they do not have time to devote planning this type of meeting on a regular basis. This is likely the reason many of these opportunities have fallen by the wayside. There needs to be an outside organization specifically designated to provide this facilitation, doing the legwork of planning and organizing people and opportunities, in order for any of these networking groups to have the lasting effect of contributing to the professionalization of the field.



### **Competition and the Future of the Field**

Several interview participants expressed concern with the business aspects of the field. Namely, they were worried about maintaining competitiveness among the increasing numbers of schools with International Programs. As more and more students choose to come from abroad, individual institutions will struggle to attract these students. One participant pointed out that she doesn't want to end up with a "cookie cutter program" that is exactly like all the other schools (M. Donkor, personal communication, February 20, 2015). It is always useful to have professional development offerings, but they should be flexible and plentiful enough so as not to crowd out the visions of individual schools. Any new resources should consider this when bringing schools together.

Many participants also expressed uncertainty about the future of the field. The huge influx of Chinese students is likely to continue for the foreseeable future, but may not last forever. Therefore, marketing and admissions decisions play a large role not only in determining projections for the field, but in ensuring the continuation of International Programs in general (J. Welch, personal communication, January 27, 2015). Understanding trends among students coming from abroad is a large factor in schools' decisions to expand or allocate resources to their International Programs, and any new professional development offerings should be sure to account for these crucial departments.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

As this study makes clear, more professional development opportunities would be welcomed by currently practicing professionals, though not necessarily an altogether new organization. A useful extension of this study would be a closer review of the existing

organizations and their infrastructure, to determine if any of them could "house" a formalized secondary level professional organization. The guidelines generated by this type of study would provide a much better concept of what a professional organization should, and could, entail, by providing a clearer picture of the existing landscape of organizations.

Based on the interview responses highlighted in this study, it seems feasible that a part of an existing organization could be restructured to account for high school professionals' specialized needs. Many interview participants expressed that NAFSA has already evolved past the point where they could likely provide for secondary level professionals. The most likely organizational candidates for this undertaking would be NAIS and TABS. Since both of these groups have been dedicated to professional development for secondary level roles from the start, they are already providing for International Advisors and their peers on many levels. The existing NAIS-TABS Global Symposium reflects a strong working relationship between the two groups, and this partnership has already begun to address the professional development needs of this field. Adding to the Global Symposium infrastructure would be a promising method for addressing these professionals' needs. Further research would have to be done in order to gauge this feasibility.

Another important area of research related to this field is how to best provide for beginner professionals just entering the field. Ongoing research has begun to address this for the field of International Education at large, and there is a good deal of discussion regarding entry-level professional development. NAFSA offers a year-long Academy in International Education, which "accelerates your learning process...prepares you for leadership...[and] is an investment in your career in International Education" (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2015c). Other organizations have similar offerings as well. However, as the specialization of secondary-

level International Student Advising expands, the specific needs of those attempting to gain a foothold within the field will need to be provided for as well.

### **Practical Applicability**

From the outset of the study, it was my intention to gather enough information to create an organization that would address all of the needs of secondary-level International Education professionals. In fact, the original plan for this project was to create a full program design for a new organization. It was decided that, at this point at least, the focus of any research should be a preliminary needs assessment, and to determine the demand for such an organization.

With the completion of this needs assessment, the basic guidelines for progress have been determined. It is the hope of this study that the clear demand for increased professional development opportunities in this field can now be addressed. This research can be directly applied to this process, and through further collaboration - perhaps between the researcher and some of the interview participants - could be developed into useful programs, trainings, or conferences that could provide well for those working in the field.

### **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that there is a strong need for increased professional development offerings for high-school level International Education professionals. It is clear that professional organizations play an important role in the professionalization of a field, by providing and defining membership, by disseminating education, information and resources, by bringing professionals together and by creating a platform for professionals to shape the future of the field.

As an emerging field, secondary-level International Educators are in need of an overarching organization that provides each of these important elements. The number of students coming to the United States, and, therefore, the number of schools and administrators necessary to support them, is on the rise. Thus far in its evolution, several different organizations have begun to address the needs of these practitioners, but none provide an umbrella approach to the field as a whole.

According to the participants who were interviewed for this study, there are many questions that could well be answered by the provision of further professional development offerings. These include: assistance helping international and American students integrate (though this was focused just among day schools); teacher trainings on helping students get involved in the classroom, think critically and independently, and on how to be more sensitive to students' needs; cultural sensitivity training for both International Education professionals and school-wide; a standardized ESL curriculum and guidelines across schools, as well as networking opportunities; and screening of third-party admissions providers for international students.

Reflecting on these clear questions within the field, this study concludes that professional development offerings for secondary-level International Educators are substantially lacking. However, the solution is not necessarily a new professional organization. Any advancements in this area will have to strongly account for the demands on any professional's time, and their inability to be in a dozen places at once. This means that, moving forward, one of the main goals of professional development offerings should be to consolidate, instead of proliferate, the conferences, workshops, networking events, and other resources that are available.

This could be accomplished by restructuring an existing organization, such as NAIS, TABS or building upon the partnership that already exists. Another logical solution would be to create a new organization. The demand for this is clear, but would obviously be a substantial undertaking for any individual or cohort. If this creation were to take place, any new organization should be sure to include resources for each aspect of the field (admissions, student life, academics, ESL, etc.) and should be directly applicable to high school programming. This will eliminate the need for professionals to attend multiple different events, and network with multiple groups, in order to satisfy the full range of their needs.

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## Appendix A - Interview Participants

Name	Title	School, D=Day; B=Boarding
Marta Cabral	Coordinator of Global Education	Notre Dame Academy (D)
Emily Kise	ELL Faculty	Bridgeport Academy (D)
Erika Picciotto	Asst. International Student Coordinator	Suffield Academy (B)
Diane Crawford-Kelly	ESL Faculty	Walnut Hill School (B)
Evan Kleber	Head of ESL Program	Oxford Academy (B)
Jennifer Welch	Diversity Coordinator & Director of International Program	Thayer Academy (D)
David Thompson	Director of International Programs	Hotchkiss School (B)
Kathryn Taylor	Director of Global Programs	Westover School (D & B)
Karen Olah	Director of Int'l Student Programming	Woodstock Academy (D)
Sara Moger	International Student Coordinator	The Master's School (D)
Karoline Theobald	International Student Coordinator	The Gunnery (D & B)
Colleen warnick	Director of International Admissions	The Hyde School (B)
Jody Lampe	International Student Coordinator	South Kent School (B; all boys)
Matti Donkor	Dir. of Multicultural Student Outreach	Miss Porter's School (D&B, all girls)



Megan Blunden	Director of International Students	Loomis Chaffee School (D & B)
Jamie Cascio	Director of International Student Life	The Newman School (D)
Ming Hui Tseng	International Student Coordinator	Worcester Academy (D & B)
Hillary Sibille	Academic Coord. for Int'l Students	Watkinson School (D)
Anonymous	Director of Diversity	Hopkins School (D)
Merry Conway	Associate Director of the Center for International Students	Tabor Academy (D & B)

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

- What is your job title?
- Please describe the organizational structure of the international program at your school.
  - What department/organization do you report to?
  - What services do you provide your students?
- How many international students attend your school? What is the total number of students who attend your school?
- Please describe the demographics of your school - are international students involved with the greater, domestic student population?
- Are you a member of NAFSA, NAIS, CSIET or any other professional trade organizations?
  - *If yes:* Has this membership been useful for you? In what ways?
  - *If no:* What factors contributed to the decision not to join?
- What professional development resources have you utilized in this position (or past positions in the same field)?
- Do you feel as though there are relevant professional development opportunities available for you in this field?
  - *If yes:* Can you describe any available resources that you have or have not utilized?
  - *If no:* What opportunities would you like to see available that would help you excel in your career?

- In your opinion, do you think a new organization created specifically to address the needs of secondary-level International Education professionals would be useful? Why or why not? Please elaborate.