

## **Siloed in Their Thoughts: A Phenomenological Study of Higher Education Leaders' Perceptions of Internationalization in Changing Times**

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### **Abstract**

*With academic capitalism as a framework, we conducted a qualitative study with a phenomenological approach to explore higher education leaders' perceptions of internationalization during the initial stages of the Covid-19 shutdown in 2020. The study's findings indicate that, overall, administrators value internationalization as a process that creates quality educational programming. However, leaders are influenced by institutions' cultures and priorities, and they feel isolated as they seek to appeal to constituents to promote internationalization. Aware of the increasing use of commercial models and emphasis on generating revenue to compensate for funding shortfalls, higher education leaders vacillate from emphasizing revenue to promoting educational and social value. Upper-level administrators prioritize articulated institutional commitment and administrative leadership for internationalization over curriculum and faculty policies and practices. Overall, upper-level administrators value internationalization.*

**Keywords:** academic capitalism, administration, internationalization, leaders, perceptions, phenomenology

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### **Introduction**

Comprehensive internationalization has been lauded as one of the most transformative initiatives undertaken in the last two decades (Rumbley et al., 2012). According to ACE's publication, *Mapping Internationalization on US Campuses*, the only comprehensive source of data and analysis on internationalization, the most influential determiners of internationalization efforts are administrators (Helms et al., 2017). However, scholars and critics have criticized higher education leaders for practices motivated by profit rather than education, especially the practice of prioritizing international student recruitment above other areas of internationalization for monetary gain (Altbach, 2006, 2012; Andrews, 2006; Fischer, 2018; Schrecker, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). In 2002 and again in 2011, Hans de Wit posited that higher education institutions (HEIs) approach internationalization to suit their specific purposes, and Altbach (2012) condemned higher education institutions (HEIs) for lowering standards to increase profit from international educational programming. Whether for education or profit and regardless of the effectiveness of the strategies, educational

programs and priorities do not exist in a vacuum—they emerge from the leaders who actualize them, and research is needed to understand higher education leaders’ perceptions of and motivations for or against internationalization (Appe, 2020; McClure, 2016).

Given the recent disruptions in higher education and the global economy because of politics and Covid-19 (Fischer, 2019), many, including the faculty who lead internationalization on U.S. campuses (Deardorff, 2009), will benefit from current studies on higher education leaders’ perceptions of and motivations for internationalization. Therefore, this phenomenological study builds on past studies and continues to describe administrators’ perceptions of internationalization using academic capitalism as a framework. The study was designed to answer the following questions:

What perceptions do upper administrators have of internationalization as a process and of the areas that internationalization involves?

What perceptions do administrators have of their decisions about internationalization?

To conduct this study, we relied on the American Council on Education’s (ACE) 2017 definition of comprehensive internationalization (CI) as a process “that seeks to align and integrate policies, programs, and initiatives to position colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected.” The ACE 2017 framework for internationalization includes articulated institutional commitment, administrative leadership, curriculum, faculty policies and practices, student mobility, and partnerships.

## **Background**

American higher education leaders’ motivation for what later became known as internationalization was initially influenced by historical, cultural, and economic factors leading to the United States becoming preeminent in the world for international education (Garcia & Villareal, 2014). After the Second World War, federal initiatives emerged to develop inbound and outbound research and education programs, and federal funding supported these programs (Graham & Diamond, 1997). Also, the Nobel Prize gave prestige to American research programs, and federal funding bolstered scientific research during The Cold War to compete with the Soviet Union (Graham & Diamond, 1997; Thelin, 2004). American foreign policy historically drove the U.S. government to support education abroad programming, including the Less Commonly Taught Languages program (Lane-Toomey, 2014). Moreover, globalization and the widespread use of English as the language of commerce further encouraged the proliferation of international education initiatives in the United States (Altbach, 2004; Garcia & Villareal, 2014). Jane Knight (1994) identified and described internationalization as a process for educators to prepare citizens to “work and live in an environment that is both local and global in nature” (p. 1). Different definitions of internationalization exist, and, depending on the stakeholder, some areas of internationalization take priority over others (Trilokekar, 2007; Zolfaghari et al., 2009). The commonly accepted definition of internationalization is the process of “integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service elements of an institution” (Jane Knight & International Association of Universities, 2006).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, internationalization was recognized as a response to increasing globalization (Altbach, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007). The American Council on Education (ACE, 2017) developed a model that encapsulated the breadth of the field of internationalization and includes the following areas: 1) articulated institutional commitment, 2) administrative leadership, 3) curriculum, 4) faculty policies and practices, 5) student mobility, and/or 6) partnerships. At the same time, funding sources for higher education diminished, and higher education institutions began to utilize practices to fill funding gaps (Manning, 2018). Concerns about misunderstandings and misconceptions of internationalization as a process abounded, including notions that internationalization was achieved by increasing the number of international students, faculty, and agreements (Knight, 2011). Knight (2011) asserted that the success of internationalization cannot be limited to quantifiable outcomes, calling for higher education leaders to “ensure that internationalization is on the right track ... as higher education sectors weather these rather turbulent times where competitiveness, rankings, and commercialism seem to be the driving forces” (p. 15). To contend with funding shortfalls due to federal and state budget cuts and the growing costs of higher education, strategic focus in international education changed, with HEIs prioritizing one aspect of internationalization in particular, international students, themselves. Many institutions focused on admissions because international students oftentimes paid more in tuition than U.S. students, and

whose contributions toward competitive research programs, patents, and other lucrative initiatives helped, HEIs fill funding gaps (Altbach, 2012; Fischer, 2019; Manning, 2018).

In 2017, for the first time in almost two decades, undergraduate student enrollment in the United States began to decline (IIE, 2018). Some blamed poor practices that de-emphasized standards and emphasized profit (Altbach, 2012; Knight, 2012; Rumbley et al., 2012; Taylor, 2004; Zemsky, 2005), while others claimed the nationalistic rhetoric of Donald Trump's administration caused international students to pause and reconsider studying in the United States (Fischer, 2019). However, as Knight and de Wit (2018) assert, nationalism is nothing new. In an article in *The Chronicle of Education*, Fischer (2019) countered the pervasive allegations that the rhetoric and policies of President Donald J. Trump's administration led to the decline in international student enrollment, evoking Altbach's (2012) scathing indictment of HEIs for using commercial institutional practices and touting institutional missions that include global education without aligning resources and strategies to the missions. In addition to reviving Altbach's criticisms, Fischer (2019) asserted that blaming the Trump administration entirely for the downward trends and problems in international education is too simplistic. Faculty members, historically the greatest champions for international education, blamed HEI leadership for compromising the democratic and humanistic ideals that the American academe is bound to protect by creating international branch programs in China and the Middle East (Fischer, 2019). Although international student enrollment had begun to decline, the United States was still the top destination for international students in 2019, according to the IIE Open Doors (2020) annual report. Then, the pandemic, COVID-19 began to spread across the globe. Consequently, Fall enrollment dropped, and the funding crisis in U.S. institutions of higher education worsened in ways that are still unquantifiable (Mitchell, 2020; Smalley, 2020).

Higher education overall, and international educational programs and initiatives, have been irrevocably altered in ways that scholars will undoubtedly spend decades researching. This study was conducted during shutdowns when travel bans designed were implemented to lower the infection rate, and international educators were scrambling to propose redesigning their programs. The participants, higher education leaders, were re-evaluating their priorities for funding and organization. Due to the shutdown, HEIs were unable to use international programming as a means of generating revenue if that was ever the primary motive as Altbach (2012) and others (Kauppinen, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) alleged, and the future of international education and its place in HEIs was uncertain. Therefore, participants, all executive-level administrators who determined strategy and resources for international education, offered a perspective stripped of past expectations or assumptions about international education as a profitable or even possible endeavor. With some HEIs still prohibiting education abroad and international travel and many COVID protocols still in place, this study provides insight into the phenomenon of leaders' perceptions of internationalization as a process and the components of internationalization, and of their decisions about internationalization.

## Literature Review

To create a foundation on which to build the current study, the researcher reviewed the literature on internationalization and leaders' influence in creating a culture for internationalization (Adel et al., 2018; de Wit, 2013, 2018; Helms et al., 2017; Hudznik, 2011, 2013; Merckx, 2018; Merckx & Nolan, 2018; Peterson & Helms, 2013), and academic capitalism and internationalization (Kauppinen, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009).

### Academic Capitalism, Leadership, and Internationalization

Stafford and Taylor (2016) claim that internationalization is an opportunity for institutions to merge agendas to achieve the public good and raise revenue, but Altbach (2012), Pasque (2007), and de Wit (2013) argue that those agendas are, de facto, conflicts of interest. Using a business model, institutional leaders emphasize student mobility to create international student and faculty exchanges, focusing on lucrative student enrollment in marketable programs rather than on academic integrity and societal good (Manning, 2018). Academic capitalism is a term to describe "a regime" in higher education that uses commercial practices (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Due to funding shortages resulting from the loss of state funding, academic capitalist regimes took action that added revenue generation to the function of the university, leading to commercial systems and practices in higher education (Kauppinen, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) condemned using knowledge as a commodity rather than facilitating knowledge for the

sake of public good and examined practices that emerge from new circuits of knowledge and new markets, including initiatives for internationalization. Slaughter and Rhoades (2009) described an academic capitalist knowledge regime that utilizes short-term international exchange programs with thin educational offerings, distance learning programs with lower success, corporate-style patenting of knowledge, and unethical recruiting methods designed to increase profit from tuition. While pivotal, their study was criticized for being U.S.-centric and for not being focused on one vein of academic capitalism in higher education (Zemsky, 2009), and it was Kauppinen (2012) who built on Slaughter and Rhoades' (2009) study by exploring transnational networks and knowledge as a commodity in a theoretical and mixed-methods study.

Kauppinen (2012) elaborated on the “networks (e.g., new circuits of knowledge, networks that intermediate between the public and private sectors) and practices (e.g., new investment and marketing activities)” associated with internationalization that draw various groups in higher education institutions into a new economy (Kauppinen, 2012, p. 553). Networks are increasingly mobile and fluid and tend to operate increasingly transnationally (de Wit, 2013; Kauppinen, 2012). Nations and systems of interconnected nations, such as those connected through the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University of Students (ERASMUS), (a European Union student exchange program), transcended being knowledge and cultural exchanges and created opportunities for academics and universities to diversify their funding base (Heyl, 2007; Kauppinen, 2012). Academic capitalism leads to practices and new economies within transnational networks, and social good is reduced to a secondary motivation to create transnational education programs and internationalize campuses (Kauppinen, 2012; Rhoades & Szelényi, 2011; Santos, 2006; Schugurensky, 2006).

To ensure the goal of coping with funding shortfalls by utilizing a business model, academic capitalist regimes move away from faculty governance and become top-down (McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). With faculty governance out of the way, higher education leaders are the decision-makers with authority to prioritize not just revenue-generating practices but also cost-saving practices that further commercialize higher education (Appe, 2020; McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). According to Appe (2020), the academic capitalist model is a top-down approach to decision making in which upper-administrators use “frameworks of corporate governance.” The model is also characterized by emphasizing learning, not teaching, utilizing professionals other than faculty members, thereby minimizing faculty control of the curriculum (Appe, 2020; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Also, the academic capitalist model commercializes the curriculum, resulting in practices like emphasizing short-term programs to move students through quickly without writing a dissertation, and online education that is not accessible to diverse populations of students who may have limited access to technological equipment and resources (Appe, 2020; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Top-down leadership fosters networks that connect the state, HEIs, and markets, and more levels of administrators ensure the sustainability of resources and organizational structuring to proliferate the commercialization of higher education (McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Considering the imperative role of upper-administrators to ensure policies, resources, and staffing and the profound effect academic capitalism has on internationalization initiatives at HEIs, it is surprising that more research has not been conducted on upper-administrators' perceptions of higher education (Appe, 2020; McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researchers used academic capitalism and phenomenology as frameworks for the study. Like internationalization, academic capitalism begins with leaders making decisions based on their perceptions. The theory of academic capitalism asserts that funding shortfalls and competition led to the capitalization of knowledge and widespread use of commercial practices in HEIs (Manning, 2018; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). The practice of academic capitalism subsists on the upper-level administrators acting as decision-makers about the budget, hiring, and organizational structure for all programs and initiatives, including internationalization (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004); therefore, academic capitalism provides the contextual framework for this study. Academic administrators are “left with the task of balancing institutional resources, faculty time, expertise, and effort” (Manning, 2018). However, academic capitalism is not just about revenue – academic capitalism is about commercialization, which requires leaders who will effectively manage the commercialization of higher education (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Therefore, academic capitalism results in the growing consolidation of upper-level administrative power, the growing number of non-faculty and administrative roles,

and the decline in the number of faculty hires and faculty governance (McClure, 2016; Schrecker, 2010; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). As Slaughter and Rhoades (2014) assert, HEIs cannot engage in academic capitalist practices without upper-level administrative leaders who can create institutional priorities, make decisions about institutional and corporate partnerships, approve and implement the strategic plan, and decide who to hire and appoint to managerial roles to guarantee access to institutional resources and normalize commercial practices.

## Methodology

The qualitative theoretical framework, phenomenology, describes clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994) related to the phenomenon of HEI leaders' perceptions of internationalization and their decisions about internationalization. Phenomenology is an approach to describe the human experience in the context of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002) – in this case, the phenomenon of higher education leaders' shifting priorities for internationalization as they are confronted with funding shortfalls and HEI's increasing use of the business model (Manning, 2018).

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research rests on the assumption that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with groups in society, and phenomenology is apt for describing awareness in the context of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To understand the leaders' perceptions of internationalization and their perceptions of themselves as creators of institutional cultures for internationalization, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study to explore the phenomenon of internationalization by describing leaders' approaches to and reasons for internationalization in the context of funding shortfalls. Higher education leaders who employ internationalization as a process are the decision-makers for which areas are promoted as priorities, and they decide if their emphases on different areas of internationalization are aimed to promote opportunities for education, revenue, or both.

## Participants

The researcher sought participants by emailing contacts in listservs for NAFSA Association of International Educators, the American International Recruitment Council (AIRC), the International Educators Council of Missouri and Illinois (IECMI), and by using snowball sampling. The author interviewed eight participants who were decision-makers for internationalization and who had administrative oversight of the senior international officer (SIO). None of the participants were in interim roles and all were over the age of 25 and worked for U.S. accredited institutions of higher education. All the participants were upper-level administrators with Vice President and Provost titles.

The researcher emailed participants to affirm that they met the inclusion criteria. No interviews were conducted without informed consent. The researcher conducted eight 30- to 45-minute semi-structured interviews on Zoom that were digitally recorded with the participants' permission. Utilizing an interview protocol, the researcher asked 12 questions using the American Council on Education's (ACE) (2017) areas of internationalization as a framework for the questions. The questions delved into the concept of internationalization and participants' priorities for specific areas of internationalization. Also, the questions addressed participants' approaches to internationalization. In addition to questioning approaches to internationalization within the context of leaders' priorities within the assumed context of academic capitalism, the questions explore leaders' motivations for internationalization. The questions were:

1. Describe your experience and background in higher education. How is your role related to international education and internationalization at your institution?
2. What is your sense of the importance of internationalization at your institution?
3. How do you define internationalization?
4. What aspect or aspects of internationalization are most important: 1) articulated institutional commitment, 2) administrative leadership, 3) curriculum, 4) faculty policies and practices, 5) student mobility, and/or 6) partnerships?
5. Why are the aspects you mentioned priorities for you?
6. How do you approach establishing those priorities at your institution?
7. Do you feel that you have encouraged an organizational culture toward internationalization at your institution?

8. What are the reasons and motivations for or against internationalization?
9. In your own words, what are the key characteristics of a successful international program?
10. How should leaders prepare their followers to embrace internationalization?
11. How do you identify problem areas that may require a change?
12. What role do administrators or leaders play in the quality of international programs?

The researcher assumes that the higher education leaders being interviewed are at least aware of the shift toward using commercial practices in higher education and that they all contend with challenges due to funding shortfalls and given the timing of the study during the initial phases of the shutdown in 2020, a potential enrollment crisis. Also, the participants could stop or pause the interview without prejudice or penalty and had anonymity.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher, a practitioner in international education and an administrator, utilized approaches from social sciences, folkloristics, and anthropology, specifically, indigenous concept analysis (emic) and indigenous typologies of participants' transcripts to identify familiar themes and ideas. The researcher created a chart of codes, code descriptions, and subcategories for each code (Privitera & Ghlgrim-Delzell, 2019) to investigate HEI leaders' perceptions. Using member checking and thick description of the transcripts, the researcher then analyzed the chart to determine invariant themes (Privitera & Ghlgrim-Delzell, 2019). To achieve horizontalization, codes helped to analyze the transcripts and discover repeated statements and ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Synthesis emerged after she integrated connected ideas that described the phenomenon of HEI leaders' perceptions of themselves as leaders and of the process of internationalization.

## **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher performed member checks of interpretations and key concepts and phrases and kept a journal about potential interferences and biases before the interviews and throughout the coding process (Merriam, 2002), eventually achieving what Patton (2015) described as "Epoch," a clear and unbiased mindset. Furthermore, the process of reflexivity was continuously used through the data analysis and research process by writing in a research journal and self-monitoring for biases (Patton, 2015) and recorded ideas in bracketed research notes while analyzing coding to separate personal experience from the participants' experiences (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## **Results**

### **Theme 1: A Shift in the Function of Internationalization**

The study's findings indicate that upper-level administrators perceive themselves as passionate advocates for internationalization for personal reasons and out of a commitment to societal good; yet, they have become actors whose leadership is affected by the rise of and widespread growth of academic capitalism. The participants expressed that the values they hold as individuals, such as diversity and experiential education, are not priorities to integral stakeholders for internationalization, such as the board of trustees, other upper-level leaders, and the president. Participants used the language of business to explain their passion and business terms to explain their professional accomplishments. Furthermore, participants spoke to different campus constituencies about different priorities, sensing when internationalization would be valued for philosophical or educational reasons and when internationalization was valued for revenue potential. The participants grappled with conflicts of interest between campus constituents and within themselves, so much so that, as Participant Five put it, they became "siloes in their thoughts."

Participants articulated their value of internationalization as a tool to prepare students to compete in a global market and workforce. Participant Five said,

We are sending students out into the world; they are going to act at a global level. It's no longer you're going to go work for a company in Wisconsin and you're only going to deal with the politics and the business within Wisconsin. We are acting across different countries, across the world.

The interviewee discussed internationalization as an integral tool for creating campus diversity, and stated diversity for the sake of intercultural experiential education is their top priority. For others, they explained, they value the revenue potential. As the participant explained:

I think it's easy for people to get bogged down in, for instance, if our CFO is trying to balance a budget, it's very easy to get bogged down into, 'Well, this is what we are experiencing this year ... we need our expenses to be at this level.' So, it's getting pulled down into the weeds and out of the strategy, and where sometimes it's difficult to look out into the future or look up and out and say, 'This is what we need to be doing, because of A, B, and C, versus this is what I am experiencing today. And all I know is that we need to control our expenses.

Participant Seven also explained that the diversity and curricular needs the participant perceived as essential were at odds with what the institution was interested in accomplishing through internationalization, and the awareness of their needs affected her approach to internationalization. Participant Seven said,

Because leaders and Board of Trustees members, when they think of international student enrollment, the first thing they think of is, 'Cha-ching, they're paying cash.' They don't think about what it's doing to help their students evolve.

Later, the participant added,

[The Board members] don't think about what it means to have a diverse student body that celebrates differences and how they're going to be putting out a better product than their competitors. They're just looking at that bottom line ... if we could get 10 international students who paid cash, we would be so much better off next year, and that's not what it should be about.

Therefore, the participant chose to rely on agencies to recruit international students and avoid traveling to recruit, and the participant de-emphasized study abroad programming and conversations about internationalizing the curriculum to focus on co-curricular activities, such as a global food festival.

Participant Eight, an upper-level administrator at an institution with a large international student population, described a passion for international education while also using the language of business. Initially, the interviewee framed professional achievements related to student enrollment numbers and the participant's involvement with recruitment organizations and frequently discussed the return on investment from working with recruitment agents. The participant spoke extensively about using recruitment agents and marketing professionals as "partners" and called the curriculum "our product." They emphasized the importance of the role of administration in giving the faculty a voice and said, "If [faculty] don't have the support of a dean or a vice president or a CFO or someone like that, then everything else falls to the ground," explained Participant Eight. When asked about the importance of internationalization as a process, the participant began to speak more quickly and leaned forward and said that internationalization is integral to creating inclusion and diversity in higher education:

Diversity is the easy part, finding a group of people from different backgrounds, but what I think is really important from an internationalization perspective is it allows us to facilitate conversations around equity and inclusion.

After expressing grief about sending international students' home during the shutdown, the participant explained that quality educational programming is impossible without international students. Then, the participant began to discuss their personal experiences traveling and interacting with intercultural and international friends gained through that travel.

I've learned and gained so much personally and professionally through being a part of internationally diverse experiences, and I'm so passionate about my job and my students, and I want my students to have a good experience ... I want them to have the same benefit that I had in my professional career. That's my big driver, personally.

Like Participant Eight, Participant One had personal reasons motivating them to value internationalization for academic integrity and cultural enrichment while also expressing a sense of duty to be successful within the academic capitalist model as an administrator. Participant One described achievements at recruiting in terms of revenue, saying,

We make somewhere around \$2 million. For an institution this size, that's a major, major [accomplishment]... we're pulling in two to three [million] in international recruitment." The participant finished the question about

the participant's background in higher education and current role related to internationalization by describing different perspectives.

Participant One said, "One of the perspectives professionally is that I went off to college and had never been around people that were different, from different cultures growing up." The participant described the participant's experience of having a roommate from overseas and the influence of international education on the participant's life, saying that their family and career are internationalized and a product of internationalization. The interviewee explained that their purpose was aligned with the institutional mission and described the experience at the institution as "a blessing," saying that the institutional history was "serving and helping bring people here," including African American students before slavery had ended, and women students before women were widely accepted into higher education. "We don't have a large budget," and revenue enables the institution to "prepare students to be able to compete in a global market from an educational, from an emotional, and a social application."

Participant Two said they have different audiences to ensure funding for institutional resources, explaining that the board of trustees and the president want revenue. Like the other participants, they were beholden to a personal purpose and their duty as an administrator to use business practices and generate revenue. The participant, a provost, explained, "I'm an administrator, so it comes back to numbers a lot of the time. I think that we want to increase our international students because, one, it's profitable for the university. Two, it creates multiculturalism on campus." Like the other participants, Participant Seven believed their role as an upper-level administrator involved using internationalization efforts on profitable endeavors.

## **Theme 2: Upper-Level Administrators' Top Priorities for Internationalization Include Articulated Administrative Commitment and Leadership**

The researcher asked interviewees to define internationalization, and then each participant was asked to rank ACE's (2017) six areas of internationalization in order of importance: 1) Articulated institutional commitment, 2) administrative leadership, 3) curriculum, 4) faculty policies and practices, 5) student mobility, and 6) partnerships. Subsequently, the researcher asked interviewees to explain their rationale for the order of importance they chose. Overwhelmingly, participants valued administrative leadership and articulated institutional commitment to internationalization as the top two areas of internationalization. They said that administrative leadership influences the articulated institutional commitment, or vice-versa, and those two areas of internationalization determine what areas will be prioritized within top-down leadership structures.

Participant One also placed leadership as a top priority for areas of internationalization and described the importance of good upper-level administration in both moral and economic terms. Participant One said administrative leadership was a top priority for internationalization and described each institutional leader's connection to the mission, including the participant's own, saying, "So we are a Christian institution. We want students from all over the world and we share that Christian mission." Then, after describing the institution's history of including oppressed members of society as part of the Christian mission, they asserted that leadership was also integral to ensuring that internationalization could be a tool to raise revenue. Savvy upper-level administrators, they explained, should seek diverse international students because "it's like diversifying your assets." Participant One said that some institutions that had emphasized that China would have lost students and revenue in the spring of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and institutions that prioritized Brazilian students would have slowed their internationalization efforts when the currency was devalued, but their institution did not suffer enrollment losses because they and other leaders at their HEI had strategically recruited for diverse populations.

Participant Four explained they valued administrative leadership because they "are actually leading and creating the vision and willing to roll up their sleeves," and explained that curriculum was the administrators' "product." The participant, an upper-level administrator, discussed the deans' roles in guiding the faculty, and discussed the importance of "curriculum with learning objectives that are properly crafted and properly assessed." They did not discuss teaching or faculty when discussing the curriculum as an integral aspect of internationalization.

Participants asserted a connection between articulated institutional commitment and administrative leadership, noting that leaders are the actors who articulate institutional commitment and make hiring decisions to ensure the proliferation of administrative leadership. Participant One said, "There's some bleed-over in the way [articulated



institutional commitment and administrative leadership] work, but that's definitely the first step." The participant said that the administrative leadership is responsible for writing international student diversity into the strategic plan to ensure revenue from the international student population by ensuring the institution does not become overly reliant on one country for enrollment. "It's like diversifying your assets," they explained. Also, an articulated institutional commitment will ensure that the strategic plan includes priorities to justify hiring more staff members to support the international students from a centralized office.

Participant Five said that articulated administrative commitment was the top priority: "Yeah. It all filters down from there. If we're not committed from leadership and the Board down, then [internationalization's] never going to happen." However, as they noted, "There are realities of higher education right now that are making it difficult to ... especially for some small colleges, for instance ... even stay open. So, there's this fear of the financial aspect and focusing more on that fiscal aspect of revenue versus expenses rather than maybe what we've dealt with in the past that's a little more philosophical."

### **Theme 3: Upper-level Administrators Ranked Curriculum and Faculty Policies and Practices as Low-Priority Areas of Internationalization**

When ranking their priorities for areas of internationalization, the participants ranked curriculum and faculty policies and practices after articulated institutional commitment and administrative leadership. None of the participants discussed teaching when elaborating on their ideas about curriculum and faculty policies and practices as prioritized areas of internationalization. Over the course of the entire study, only one participant mentioned teaching briefly in the context of student mobility, not curriculum and faculty policies and practices. The participants focused on administrative oversight of the faculty to assess the curriculum and create faculty policies and practices to ensure institutional effectiveness. Participant Three explained that articulated institutional commitment to internationalization is a higher priority because that commitment directly influences the curriculum. Participant Four used the same logic for prioritizing administrative leadership to ensure the curriculum for internationalization. "[Administrative leadership and articulated institutional commitment] drive faculty policies and practices," said Participant Three, before adding that articulated institutional commitment would also lead to student mobility and partnerships because the administrative leadership would ensure outcomes connected to articulated priorities. Nothing was possible with the articulated commitment and the administration, and the upper-level administrators were responsible for managing the faculty members to guide the curriculum.

None of the participants alluded to shared governance to ensure the delivery of institutional priorities for internationalization; instead, they focused on connecting departments and administrators to ensure the delivery of internationalized programming and the curriculum. Participants focused on the importance of assessment when discussing curriculum, and they perceived the administration as the leaders of the assessment process. Participant One said,

To ensure institutional effectiveness you need to have assessment. You need to have [global curriculum] in every major instead of just one class called Global Issues. There needs to be something that prepares these young people for the globalized world that they're going to be going into, and it needs to be able to be assessed in the institutional learning outcomes, ILO.

Participant Eight also placed curriculum beneath administrative leadership and articulated institutional commitment because, as they explained, the curriculum is the "product" and administrators lead the process of developing "properly crafted and properly assessed" learning objectives. Participant Four said that faculty policies and practices should be prioritized after administrative leadership because "if you don't have leadership on board, it's very hard to do things, especially because higher ed is very bureaucratic." They said faculty have the most important role at the institution "outside of administration." Pausing, they added, "A lot of people forget that we're serving the administration, we're serving the faculty, and we're serving the students." Then, Participant Four explained that the curriculum was a lower priority because faculty practices and policies and the "leadership support to infuse [the curriculum]" are essential to pursuing internationalization.

While none of the participants discussed teaching when discussing curriculum and faculty policies and procedures, focusing instead on assessment, they did raise the subject of co-curricular programming and education abroad program development. Participant Seven said that they wanted to teach the faculty before endeavoring to internationalize,

and when the researcher asked them to explain, they simply said, “Instruct them to instruct” by modeling “what [internationalization] looks like.” In response to the researcher’s follow-up questions, the participant abandoned the topic of curriculum and faculty policies and practices and discussed international festivals and internationalized dining options.

In addition to assessment and co-curricular programming, participants also discussed education abroad; however, participants prioritized the other areas of internationalization over education abroad, and discussed it in the context of student mobility, not curriculum and faculty policies and practices. Again, the upper-level administrators focused on the co-curricular programming and business aspects of education abroad programming. Participant One said, “We have one group that’s going to do service working in hospitals in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. We have another group that goes to Mexico. Plus, we’re the school of record for a school in Thailand ... plus, we’re doing biodiversity in the Galapagos Islands and Belize, and I actually get money from those because we’re a school of record.”

Participant One explained that education abroad is risky and suggested utilizing consortiums to minimize the risk and cost of outbound programming. They also explained that serving as a school of record can generate revenue.

The participants spoke of the students’ presence on campus and experiences on international campuses as part of the learning experience as much as the curriculum. Each participant discussed the value of intercultural exchanges, but only one participant related the presence of international students to teaching. “International students bring a richness to the campus community,” said Participant Three. “And really [internationalization] is about how we teach our classes. So, there’s a global perspective and a lot of different areas instead of looking at what we do in the Ozarks here.”

## Discussion

Upper-level administrators perceive themselves and other administrators as the leaders of internationalization, and this finding is aligned with research that asserts that internationalization is administrator-driven (Hudzik, 2015; Helms et al., 2017; McClure, 2016; Peterson & Helms, 2013; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Furthermore, administrators are conflicted and isolated as they grapple with reconciling their philosophical investment in internationalization with academic capitalist imperatives. Within themselves and across the campus community, participants are struggling to achieve internationalization for both public good and revenue, as Stafford and Taylor (2016) can be achieved. However, they struggle against internal and external challenges to focus on the public good as HEIs expand their commercial practices and networks (Altbach, 2012; de Wit, 2013; Kauppinen et al., 2016; Pasque, 2007; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Also, in alignment with the literature, HEI upper-level administrators focus more on overseeing the assessment and development of the curriculum for revenue-generating programs than on teaching (Appe, 2020; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The leaders who participated in this study disassociated teaching from the curriculum, focusing instead on assessment, and this perception aligns with recent studies that indicate that a symptom of academic capitalism is a tendency to focus on the learning, not the teaching (Appe, 2020; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Administrators in this study, as in recent studies, measure, and value measures of learning to ensure accreditation and increase student retention and graduation rates (Appe, 2020; McClure, 2016; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Notably, the findings indicate that leaders care about generating revenue through programming and when revenue is not possible, locating other revenue-generating funding sources. Other recent studies of internationalization indicate similar findings (Appe, 2020).

The timing of the study is relevant, because travel was not possible and the revenue was suspended for the foreseeable future due to the shot-down. The participants were upper-level administrators at institutions leading the struggle at their institutions to establish online programming and function remotely. Without knowing what the future held for international education and higher education, they took the time to participate in anonymous interviews. The study findings indicate that each leader genuinely valued internationalization outside of the potential for revenue it offered.

Genuinely caring and committed leaders face complexities and pressure when they are in leadership positions that require them to work as facilitators for universities that treat international student offices as profit centers (Heyl, 2018). The upper-level administrators who participated in this study perceive the value of internationalization and care about internationalization for ensuring academic integrity and intercultural competencies for a safer, more peaceful, prosperous, and healthy world.

## Implications and Conclusion

The findings indicate that administrators perceive internationalization as an essential aspect of quality educational programming, as well as a source of revenue. The administrators customized a process of implementing different areas of internationalization at their institution based on their perceptions of internationalization as being an administrator-led endeavor with potential and risk, both human and fiscal.

The findings also indicate that upper-level administrators strive to move between many silos at their institutions, communicating to different audiences with different priorities. Also, leaders are isolated and under pressure due to conflicts of interests (their own and others') within internationalization, and the shift in higher education to the academic capitalist model with a top-down leadership structure. Moreover, HEI leaders perceive that administrative leadership and articulated institutional commitment are the most crucial areas of internationalization and affect the chances of successfully pursuing the other areas of internationalization. Notably, participants perceive that leadership and articulated institutional commitment are more imperative than curriculum and faculty policies and practices, for they believe that administrators lead the development of curriculum and faculty policies and practices.

The study is limited by evolving perceptions in a fast-changing world and field, and a limited focus on American universities, not community colleges. Future research is needed to describe administrators' changing perceptions as higher education changes and the academic capitalist networks proliferate. Future research should explore the perceptions of leaders of international institutions, as well as community colleges in the United States.

Internationalization is not the end justified by the means, but the means itself (Knight, 1994), for it is a process to achieve a balanced set of areas of international education at an institution. The process that administrators use depends on institutional culture and priorities. The study implies that internationalization, like higher education, could result in a proliferation of administrators in international education to manage the work of the endeavors, for upper-level administrators see themselves as being responsible in an increasingly top-down structure, not a body of leaders established through shared governance. Furthermore, leaders should be careful not to disconnect the teaching and the faculty from the curriculum. The final implication is that leaders value internationalization as a valuable educational endeavor, not just a source of revenue, and seek to connect across campus to pursue transformative opportunities.

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