



AIEA SENIOR INTERNATIONAL OFFICER PATHWAYS AND PERSPECTIVES

JANUARY 2024

AIEA SIO Pathways and Perspectives

Wing-kai To • *Bridgewater State University*





SIO PATHWAYS AND PERSPECTIVES

Name: **Wing-kai To**

Title: **Assistant Provost for Global Engagement, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts**

Time Served as President: **5.5 Years**

About the Institution

Bridgewater State University is a historic institution founded in 1840 and the largest public regional comprehensive university in Massachusetts. We offer diverse and equitable international programs and opportunities for faculty and students. Comprehensive internationalization is rooted in our strong commitment to student success, social justice, and high-impact practices.

Wing-kai To is the Assistant Provost for Global Engagement at Bridgewater State University, U.S.A. As the SIO, he is responsible for overseeing international operations, including partnership agreements, global programs, study abroad, and international student and scholar services. He serves as a Board Member of AIEA active in their Professional Development and Engagement Committee. He was a Fulbright Scholar to Hong Kong, a Mandela Washington Fellow to Uganda and Cape Verde, and speaker for different State Department programs.



1. Describe your current role as a senior international officer (SIO). How would you describe your institution? What areas are you responsible for?

Bridgewater State University is the largest regional comprehensive university in Massachusetts located near Boston. I currently serve as the Assistant Provost for Global Engagement and lead comprehensive internationalization in the areas of global learning and programs, study abroad, international student and scholar services, and partnerships.

2. Tell us about your career path. What were some of the critical events/decisions that led you to your current position?

I was a former tenured faculty in history and Asian Studies for more than fifteen years before transitioning into international education administration over the last eight years. Having been involved in international and area studies with experiences teaching study abroad in Asia and developing exchange partnerships, I found my passion more in the areas of international education leadership than faculty roles. The coordination of our campus internationalization lab project with the American Council on Education further motivated me to immerse myself into the knowledge and skills of becoming a senior international officer in 2018.

3. What strengths do your identities bring to the position?

As a former international student and Chinese immigrant from Hong Kong, I have found my multiple identities beneficial for promoting intercultural competence and global citizenship. My faculty, administrative, and outreach experiences complement each other in the areas of internationalization—experiences which enable me to work more effectively with different campus, community, and global stakeholders.





4. What advice would you give to aspiring SIOs in terms of knowledge, skills, and experience? Would this advice vary based on a person's identities??

There is no contradiction between international mobility and exchanges on the one hand and internationalization at home on the other. One cannot be successful without the other.

International education administrators should be involved in both supporting global learning across the curriculum and campus while fostering academic partnerships that contribute to education, research, and student success. Whether your pathways began as practitioners or faculty members, it's important to define clear internationalization goals and outcomes as well as build a team of leaders and managers who are experienced, collaborative, and student centered.

5. What would you do differently if you were just beginning your career in international education??

I have thus far spent more years as a faculty member than as an administrator and should have entered the field a bit sooner. My breadth of academic and teaching interests prevented me from pursuing more specialization and developing administrative experience earlier in my career. I had to catch up with more areas of internationalization over the last decade. I still have no regrets about my faculty experience in international education.

6. How does your work as SIO intersect and align with your institution's mission institution's mission and initiatives? Is there intersection with your institution's diversity, equity, and inclusion work?

Global engagement is an emerging priority at Bridgewater State University. As a regional institution serving many first-generation, low income, and increasingly diversified student population, we are committed to expanding internationalization through an intentional approach to promote access, affordability, and flexibility in global learning and exchanges. Partnerships, scholarships, and virtual exchanges are some of our equity-minded practices in supporting global engagement.





7. What strategic issues do you think SIOs should prioritize at this time?

The pandemic, military conflicts, political discord, and enrollment decline have posed some of the greatest threats to international higher education in recent years. We should restore our confidence in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences to function in a global society. We share the responsibility of advancing internationalization as a source for public good and an agent of change in this era of public cynicism towards higher education. Fostering intercultural competence and a commitment to tackle global challenges can further enhance the mission of internationalization in our universities.

8. What has been your favorite international experience so far? (This may be an initiative you have shepherded, an event held on your campus, an experience while studying abroad, an experience with your local international community, or anything else that stands out in your international career.)

I have always enjoyed working with faculty and students on international projects—from teaching abroad and service learning to State Department grants and virtual exchanges. I think an SIO who has been involved with a history of working relationship with faculty and students understand the transformation of international experience on a deeper level. I value the friendship I have developed with many young African leaders through the Mandela Washington Fellowship as well as long-time partnerships with Asian universities which facilitate vibrant exchange programs for faculty and students.

9. Why does internationalization matter? To you, to your institution, to your country, to the world?

Global is local and vice versa. If we isolate ourselves in our mind and actions, we create more misunderstanding and conflicts in our communities and around the world. We can bring people together to learn from one another and work out solutions through international cooperation and exchanges. Without global awareness, we also blind ourselves to injustices and inflict more harm than good on our neighbors and friends.

