

UNESCO 37 C/4 2014-2021 Medium-Term Strategy
A Student Affairs & Services Response

March 4, 2017

The Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services brings together thought leaders from around the world who work in roles that support students and higher education. These student affairs and services leaders embrace global concepts and create new knowledge and solutions to significant issues facing the tertiary sector. The Global Summit is co-sponsored by US-based NASPA-Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and the International Association of Student Affairs and Services (IASAS).

The Global Summit was established to create a forum for cross border conversations, which address global issues facing those who work in student affairs and services. The methodology of the Summit differs from a conference where information is provided in lecture, workshop, or similar format. Rather, the delegates work in teams over the course of the program, and this year used the UNESCO 2014-2021 Medium-Term Strategy (37 C/4) document as a framework to guide discovery and discussion.

The inaugural program was held in Washington, DC in 2012, and then in Rome in 2014. The program this year, 2016, was held in Cape Town, South Africa, at Stellenbosch University. A total of 40 individuals, representing 15 countries, contributed to the outcomes of this Summit.

UNESCO Document Summary

The UNESCO Medium-Term Strategy articulates the shared goals of the member states and sets the foundation for the shared vision for the next decade on the attainment of equitable and sustainable development, peace, and human rights as represented by UNESCO's declaration. The overarching objectives of peace and equitable and sustainable development are aligned to the global priorities focusing on Africa and Gender Equality.

The document is the product of collaborative work by the member states and provides an overarching vision for the role of education in achieving Human Rights for all. The document discusses comprehensive and relevant nine Strategic Objectives. All are important and visionary, and five in particular are firmly aligned to the global aims of student affairs and services within Higher Education. These are:

1. Develop education systems to foster high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all
2. Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens
3. Advancing Education for All (EFA) and shaping the future international education agenda
4. Supporting inclusive social development, fostering intercultural dialogue for the rapprochement of cultures and promoting ethical principles
5. Fostering creativity and the diversity of cultural expression

The Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services thus found that this document provided a useful framework for the discussions during the two day Summit. Each goal provides an overarching principle and value, to which student affairs is committed. The aim of the discussion at the Global Summit focused on the translation of these overarching global objectives into local realities.

Global Summit Process

Participants first worked in groups based on their region in the world, to consider the impact of the UNESCO Medium Term Strategy for their specific work. Professor Adam Habib, Chair of Universities South Africa helped to set the stage for contextualizing higher education in South Africa and provided comparisons to other parts of the world. Mr Yousaf Gabru, Chair of the South African Commission for UNESCO provided further perspectives about UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy and the connections to student affairs and services work.

Participants also worked in cross border teams to continue analyzing the UNESCO Medium Term document and specifically make affirmations and suggested contributions that can be shared with UNESCO in relation to the work of student affairs and services. This collaborative work allowed for a shared understanding of the UNESCO objectives and provided a platform for embracing the most salient concepts.

The Summit allowed for large group discussion with all participants on four topics that had surfaced in past summits. These topics were professionalization and internationalization of the field, employability and soft skills, engaging in student activism, and access and inclusion. The UNESCO Medium Term Strategy was cross-referenced with these topics to further understand student affairs and services work globally, help practitioners develop shared goals and outcomes, and work toward attaining these outcomes.

Global Summit Outcomes

Emergent issues underscored the UNESCO objectives supporting students and educational processes in higher education. Translating the vision expressed in these strategic objectives can impact the paradigm and practice of student affairs and services globally. The objectives most closely related to student affairs and services will variously impact different countries and regions, depending upon cultural norms and mores. However, a common understanding among those engaged in work with students, around broad global issues, can help create a baseline upon which can be built synergistic partnerships and collaborations across borders. Following are the ideas and concepts provided by Global Summit participants that underscore, amplify, and reaffirm many strategic objectives in the UNESCO Mid-Term Strategy.

Strategic Objective 1: Supporting Member States to develop education systems to foster high-quality and inclusive lifelong learning for all

The identification of required competencies needed to foster the type of deep learning expressed in this objective, can be the raw material for creating greater alignment across educational systems and institutions. This collaboration can help facilitate multiple constituencies working together to ensure high-quality learning environments. Delegates underscored the need to empower students to be part of the conversation that moves from debate to dialog and allows for many and multiple voices to be heard. It is hoped that from this dialog new and alternative models for educational credentialing, delivery methods, and innovative lifelong learning strategies will emerge.

2: Empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens

To empower learners to be creative and responsible citizens is to reframe and rethink curricular design. In this way, the development of these concepts includes indigenous knowledge and unique ways of sharing knowledge that supports and fosters entrepreneurialism and responsible global citizenship. Understanding how information is delivered and received is essential, as is identifying learning outcomes that can guide curricular reform. The education process around these concepts must also take co-curricular forms and recognize the importance of education in developing creativity and lifelong global citizenship.

3: Advancing Education for All (EFA) & shaping the future international education agenda

With a focus on the essential humanistic elements of this UNESCO objective, Global Summit delegates advocated for basic needs of people and individuals, broad human rights, and inclusivity when approaching international education. The global higher education agenda must include a focus on lifelong learning and impactful, meaningful cross-cultural experiences. Broad, critical, and hopeful issues such as peace, sustainability, and gender equity must be considered as integral aspects of this conversation.

6: Supporting inclusive social development, fostering intercultural dialogue for the rapprochement of cultures and promoting ethical principles

Through a student learning lens, participants viewed the concepts embedded in this objective as key mechanisms for supporting inclusive social development, intercultural dialogue, and ethical principles. Adversity and impactful world events can profoundly shape student experiences, which positions student affairs personnel to assist in supporting these inclusive concepts. Fostering free and open expression as well as practicing broad access to quality education is central to creating educational environments that foster high quality intercultural dialogue and learning. Identifying the core competencies and skills that can be used over a lifetime, and infused across education, will improve the capacity for achieving this inspiring and challenging objective.

7: Protecting, promoting and transmitting heritage

Maintaining cultural heritage was of pivotal importance to this discussion. Taking into consideration issues and concerns globally, commonality can be born out of discussion, which averts any sort of destruction of heritage. Rather, a common understanding must emerge that appreciates multiple voices in the conversation and respects individual perspectives. Understanding one's own identity must occur first, before one can truly look and think globally. Student affairs and services supports the promotion and transmission of heritage by helping students embrace their cultural identities and then move beyond that to a truer understanding of others and a common ideology that is shared locally and globally.

8: Fostering creativity and the diversity of cultural expressions

Creativity and diversity of cultural expression can be promoted and developed by acknowledging the need to be intentional in the provision of educational opportunities. Student services can support students by role modeling these ideals and by creating spaces that allow for meaningful engagement among various constituencies. Dialoguing about cultural and diverse issues will help with soft skill development of students. Considering how these programs and services are positioned, in terms of how students access them and how they relate to the curriculum, are important issues to embrace when fostering creativity and diverse cultural expression.

9: Promoting freedom of expression, media development and access to information

Global Summit delegates affirmed the focus on the collective as opposed to the individual, and reaffirmed the need to focus on implementation as a critical aspect of this objective. Freedom of expression and broad access to information is a key element of higher education, and including a focus on student life and student development is encouraged to be part of the ongoing conversation. These discussions must be contextualized within individual country and regional cultures, mores, and norms.

Conclusion

Student affairs and services supports the efforts of UNESCO in creating vision and direction for education within a global context. The affirmations and issues presented by Global Summit delegates are in alignment with the UNESCO strategic objectives and continued diligence is urged in achieving these strategies together.

Post-Script

The Global Summit on Student Affairs and Services was held 26-28 October, 2016 in Cape Town, Stellenbosch, South Africa. The list of organizations that follows includes a wide range of individual universities, professional associations, and other organizations that represent the interests of student affairs and services practitioners. No one organization endorses this document, but the information shared here is a product of the overall emergent themes of Global Summit.

ACPA – College Educators International
Association of College and University Housing Officers-International
Association of College Unions International
Association for Student Conduct Administration
Canadian Association of College and University Student Services
Confederation of Student Services Ireland
Deutsches Studentenwerk
Duoc UC
European Council for Student Affairs
European University College Association
European University College Association
Florida Gulf Coast University
Fudan University
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik
International Association of Student Affairs and Services
Loyola University Chicago
NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
New England College
NIRSA – Leaders in Collegiate Recreation
NODA – Association for Orientation, Transition and Retention in Higher Education
North West University
Moshal Scholarship Program
Qatar University
Shanghai University of International Business and Economics
Stellenbosch University
Tshwane University of Technology
University of Botswana
Universidad Católica de Chile
University College Cork
AMOSHE – The Student Services Organization
University of Kwazulu-Natal
University of the Western Cape
Victoria University of Wellington
Washington University