



2024 Executive Board Election Candidate

Representative to the Executive Board

Name: Giorgi Sichinava

Title: Director of University and Career Counseling

Institution: European School

Location/Region: Georgia/Europe

Member Group: Secondary (High School)

All Applicant Questions

Discuss your involvement with International ACAC, highlighting specific roles (with dates) and contributions made during your volunteer or leadership tenure.

I love the way IACAC encourages me to volunteer and draws out the best in me. This year (2023-2024), I joined the Mentor Year Program, mostly learning from my mentee (I can only hope it is reciprocal) and exploring ways that members of our community can help each other. Currently, I'm working on developing ties between the organization I founded in Tbilisi, Georgia - the University and Career Counseling Association (UCCA) and IACAC, hoping to help its regional efforts. UCCA already has its charter, office space, growing membership (although the numbers are modest in small regions), and donors. It will allow me to connect with colleagues locally and regionally in a meaningful way, not as a counselor from one school, but as a fellow member of a local/regional association. I have been a member of International ACAC since 2019, and the organization has already given me access to so much knowledge and opportunities that it is now time for me to volunteer and contribute.

Identify and articulate a critical issue in college admissions for international students that you would like to or have championed, emphasizing its importance and potential impact on the community.

International students do not always get the counseling they deserve as the profession in their areas/regions is lagging behind. They end up working with agencies, applying to destinations their previous generations have matriculated to, and only later realize they have been “Advised badly.” To counter this, I have founded the University and Career Counseling Association in Tbilisi, Georgia. In this organization, more active members of the international counseling community can create the profession from scratch and empower school administrators who are arbitrarily given the counseling role in their schools by giving them resources, contacts, and insights that can only be accumulated after years of practice. With the resources and contacts locally, the organization is currently working to advocate for the “university and career counselor for every school” program with the local government. I believe International ACAC will be instrumental in guiding newcomers to the profession, especially in areas, where the lack of local organizations and counselors’ exposure to international practices can sometimes harm students’ best interests.

Detail additional experiences that have equipped you with skills and insights applicable to the position you're applying for, emphasizing transferable accomplishments.

At my school, I run the university and career counseling office and also sit on the supervisory board. Board meetings have given me the vantage point for a bigger-picture understanding of processes, which can be thought of as an asset when contributing to an organization with a global mission and international membership. Starting in 2018, I also served as vice-chair of the steering committee that successfully led the school to its Council of International Schools accreditation. Scrutiny of the rubrics, the self-study period, and the change this period brought to the school community helped me identify factors that can bring immense positive change to schools that aim to create an international atmosphere, celebrate diversity and inclusion, and want to streamline administrative and academic processes that help the school community thrive. Working on reflections and policies and interacting with colleagues, I gained a 360-degree understanding of the needs that international schools have. I have also been a founding partner of Toastmasters Georgia and a member of the Council of Europe’s Schools of Political

Studies network; both experiences taught me how to volunteer my time to help accomplish common goals.

Outline your comprehension of the role you are applying for, specifying changes you'd like to implement while acknowledging current practices or programs you feel are effective.

I believe the role of a representative to the board fits me as the areas and task forces where my experience will make a difference will be chosen from a broader range of issues. Working with VPs and Presidents will allow me to see where I can bring more value to the organization. Of the three pillars at International ACAC, I could contribute more effectively to two - enhancing members' experience globally and clarifying the international brand. I also see how the Mentor Year Program can be enhanced by grouping the participants according to the expertise mentors have and the expertise the mentees want to acquire: our field has become so broad that it is important to gather more information to create right-fit mentor-mentee matches.

Describe your leadership philosophy and strategies for effectively managing and leading a volunteer committee, emphasizing communication, collaboration, and recognition.

I believe in keeping an open mind – arriving at conclusions through inductive reasoning to double-check if the rules we apply are transferable between contexts, cultures, and working styles. The spirit of the International ACAC must foster within one a level of humility, as I keep discovering people with significant contributions who rarely pat themselves on the back in the process or after. I would see myself as a connector who loves to give credit. With the busy schedules of people in our profession, it is only apt to maximize the recognition when they go beyond their organizations and contribute to International ACAC. As a leader, I believe in building meaningful dialogues. In all my current positions, I emphasize the need to include more stakeholders in a way that serves both – their engagement, participation, and recognition and the goals of the organization. Wider participation does not mean losing control, and International ACAC leaders understand this well.

Explain how you would leverage the position to contribute to International ACAC's strategic plan, aligning your goals with the organization's three pillars: enhancing member experience globally, clarifying the international brand, and optimizing internal operations.

I see myself contributing to enhancing members' experiences globally by engaging regions that have been less active, using my organizations – UCCA and the European School to host events, give opportunities to network, and meet universities that have yet to visit their countries. While some of the most time-consuming applications are usually submitted to selective US universities, it makes the cumulative industry insights of the college admissions and counseling centered on American practices and processes. International counselors, especially those working for schools with multiple programs, need to explore a broader spectrum of topics and options to serve their cohorts. I believe International ACAC can further enhance its leadership in the world, further clarifying its international brand and showing that it can be the umbrella organization for regional associations and active groups that create college counseling oases against all odds. As for internal operations, I would have to go through a learning curve of internal processes to even suggest ways to optimize.

Share details about a notable contribution you have made in the field, underscoring its impact on the profession and industry. Highlight specific initiatives, programs, or leadership roles that showcase your commitment and expertise.

I was first an independent counselor, running a test-prep and counseling service. Together with my team, I have helped hundreds of Georgian students reach their university and career goals and get funding. There was never a season when we did not have five pro-bono cases. These cases helped several public schools understand the process - insights they used for the following generations. When I joined the European School in 2017, I immediately took on a job that could keep three counselors busy; I worked with three programs (IB, American, and Georgian). More recently, we've added IB CP to the list, and we've been doing non-stop research to help ensure progression to programs our students will thrive in, can afford, and will be happy to join. No amount of existing data (from NACAC, IACAC, Council of International Schools, Maialearning, etc.) seems to be enough when some of our students have blacklisted passports (Yes, they've fled their countries because they disagree with their politics, but it does not automatically grant them new passports), limited resources (even top managers of big firms in Georgia may fail to catch up with the tuition), and a feeling of uncertainty. Having been among the first cohort of THE-accredited counselors, among the first three people to offer counseling services in my country, and the first in the region (the Caucasus) to

establish a counseling association, I feel it is the right time to seek ways to make an impact on a wider scale.

Share why you want to volunteer for a leadership role for International ACAC and why this particular position.

I've seen the difference that quality counseling services and ethical international organizations guiding counselors can make. It is a profession of destiny-bending educators who help students at an important developmental stage. The role of my colleagues can hardly be exaggerated. Access to counseling services opens doors not only for the privileged but also for those who have been excluded and disadvantaged. I've counted the number of days I've lived without electricity - 52. Pensions in my country could get you a single double-cheeseburger. We heated schools with what we could find - diesel or wood. At the same time, the US embassy ran Muskie and Fullbright programs, the British Council ran Chevening. Imagine the difference a young student felt when changing these realities. People who have the right counseling can save countries, economies, and lives. I remember this as I am applying for a leadership role at International ACAC.