



2024 Executive Board Election Candidate

Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Name: Omar Elnahas

Title: Consultant

Institution: Omar Elnahas

Location/Region: United States/Canada & U.S.

Member Group: Individual

All Applicant Questions

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

While I have yet to hold specific roles or volunteer directly with International ACAC, my extensive background in international student recruitment and collaboration with educational and governmental bodies aligns closely with its mission. Traveling to over 120 countries to recruit students and working alongside EducationUSA, Fulbright, and IIE have equipped me with a comprehensive understanding of global education challenges. Developing ESL programs for non-English speaking students and advising clubs like the International Club and Saudis for TV and Film demonstrate my commitment to enhancing student life and promoting cultural exchange. My volunteer work with nonprofits and low-income U.S. schools, focusing on education access, financial literacy, and college admissions, mirrors International ACAC's dedication to advancing college admission counseling globally. These experiences have prepared me to contribute significantly to International ACAC's goals, leveraging my skills in fostering inclusive educational communities and advocating for accessible international education.

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.

A critical issue that needs increased awareness is improved access and understanding of mental health resources for international students. These students generally face unique challenges such as cultural adjustments, language barriers, and, most importantly, homesickness, which can significantly impact their well-being. The standard mental health support services at most colleges are inadequate for international students as they don't include multilingual counselors and lack resources for culturally sensitive counseling approaches. Raising awareness and support of this issue will directly impact the student's academic success and overall well-being. Many universities preach inclusiveness and support, but it's generally from the domestic perspective and needs tailoring to foster a more inclusive and supportive campus environment. Addressing this issue, we help individual students and enhance the global community's diversity and richness within U.S. educational institutions. This initiative needs to surpass the common perception of just increasing the number of international students on campus for the sake of DEI but instead transform the experience of international students, ensuring they receive the comprehensive support they need to excel both academically and personally as they start their academic journeys in the United States.

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

With over a decade of leadership in higher education, my career is marked by a deep commitment to strategic direction, diversity, and global engagement. My experience in student recruitment, financial aid, and enrollment management, coupled with a focus on diversity and inclusion, aligns perfectly with the responsibilities of this position. My international student recruitment success underscores my ability to manage and enhance diversity in a global educational context. Recruiting a diverse body of students or staff is not just about filling quotas or ticking boxes; it's about enriching the experience for all. By actively seeking candidates from varied socio-economic backgrounds, underrepresented communities, and minority groups, we create a vibrant perspective that enhances learning and mirrors our multifaceted world. Embracing diversity in recruitment

means recognizing and valuing the unique experiences and potential everyone brings, regardless of their social status or wealth. This approach not only breaks down barriers of inequality but also fosters a culture of inclusivity and respect, preparing students for a globalized future. In doing so, we don't just educate; we empower future leaders to build a more equitable and understanding society.

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.

As a prospective VP for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at International ACAC, I understand the role to be multifaceted and impactful. It encompasses the oversight and enhancement of DEI within the organization. The committee's current focus on assessing membership diversity, institutional structures, and leadership pathways is commendable and forms a strong foundation. I aim to build on this by introducing more in-depth DEI training programs for all members to deepen their understanding and engagement with these critical issues. Additionally, I propose fostering collaborations with external DEI experts to infuse new perspectives and innovative practices into our work. Another crucial aspect of my approach would be to implement actionable DEI metrics. These metrics would not only track our progress but also help us to identify areas needing improvement. My goal is to ensure that our initiatives are well-intentioned and result in measurable, positive organizational changes. By maintaining and enhancing the committee's practice of regular communication and amplifying diverse voices, I aspire to make International ACAC a model for inclusive excellence in international education.

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

Successful DEI leaders inspire my approach to higher education. Understanding that this role extends beyond mere titles, I intend to ensure strategic positioning and resource allocation to enhance our DEI impact. Recognizing the dynamic nature of DEI, especially post-2020, I will focus on adaptable and responsive strategies, aligning our initiatives with global and cultural shifts. Inclusive leadership is vital, and I plan to implement a framework emphasizing place, preparation, and practice. This means fostering an inclusive culture within and outside the organization, addressing inequalities, and cultivating leadership that promotes diversity at all levels. I aim to engage all institutional sectors by forming diverse committees for

collaborative problem-solving and integrating DEI into the broader institutional fabric. Accountability is critical. I will ensure that DEI goals are a central part of our strategic plan, with clear objectives for all leaders, including myself. This approach aligns with successful practices where leaders are held accountable for their contributions to DEI, ensuring tangible outcomes responsive to the needs and diversity of our global membership.

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 aim to align my initiatives with the organization's strategic pillars to create a more inclusive, globally engaged community. Enhancing the member experience involves leveraging DEI to foster a welcoming, supportive environment where diverse perspectives are celebrated, ensuring all members feel valued and connected. I plan to launch a "Global Voices" webinar series featuring members from different regions sharing insights and challenges unique to their contexts. This approach enriches exchanging ideas and best practices, fostering a global community. To clarify the international brand, I will highlight International ACAC's commitment to DEI, showcasing it as a core value differentiating us in global education. Revising the current DEI statement backed by a series of impactful stories from our diverse members on how DEI initiatives have positively influenced their professional lives will clarify our brand as one that genuinely values and practices inclusivity. Optimizing internal operations through DEI involves revising policies and practices to ensure they promote equity and efficiency. It includes training sessions for staff and volunteers to cultivate a DEI-informed workplace culture, ensuring our organizational structure supports our DEI goals. These sessions cover unconscious bias, cultural competence, and inclusive leadership.

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.

One of my most notable contributions to international education has been developing and implementing a Global Inclusion Initiative at a prior institution. This comprehensive program aimed to increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented student populations, including students of color, international

students, and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The initiative encompassed several vital components, including targeted outreach strategies, partnerships with international schools and organizations, and the creation of scholarship programs designed to alleviate financial barriers. I also introduced a series of cultural competency workshops for faculty and staff, enhancing the campus environment to be more welcoming and supportive of diversity. I also established a peer mentorship program, connecting incoming international students with senior students from similar cultural backgrounds. It helped new students navigate their early days at the college with greater ease. Additionally, we organized cultural exchange events and workshops that celebrated the diversity of our student body, promoting a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Under my leadership, the program achieved significant results, including a considerable increase in international student enrollment and a notable improvement in campus diversity.

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

As a person of color who has personally navigated the complexities and challenges of diversity in the U.S., my desire to volunteer for this role is deeply personal and professionally driven. Throughout my life and career, I have encountered obstacles that have tested my resilience and enriched my understanding and commitment to fostering inclusive environments. These experiences have instilled in me a profound understanding of the nuances of diversity, equity, and inclusion and their critical importance in shaping educational experiences and outcomes. This position represents a meaningful opportunity to leverage my personal stories and professional expertise to make a tangible impact. It allows me to contribute to a community striving to embody the values of inclusivity and equity on a global scale. My journey, marked by overcoming barriers and achieving through perseverance, equips me with a unique perspective and a deep empathy for others facing similar challenges. I am motivated by the potential to drive change, ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion are not just ideals but practiced realities. By championing these values, we can create a more supportive and empowering environment for all members, reflecting the diverse world in which we live. Volunteering in this leadership role is an opportunity to give back and advocate for and implement strategies that celebrate diversity as a cornerstone of educational excellence and global citizenship.