Congratulations on your decision to consider a career in international education! If you are reading this book, you have most likely discovered that it is possible to find a job in which you can build on the amazing intercultural experiences you had as an undergraduate student, help others have similar experiences, travel around the world, and even contribute to the building of world peace. As an international educator, you may be involved in setting public policies related to education, advocating for global diplomacy, fostering international relationships around the world, and making a real difference in people’s lives. On both the professional and personal levels, a career in international education can offer excitement, challenges, rewards, growth, intercultural interaction, and more.

The Role of International Education

The world today is increasingly interdependent, with economic and social sectors connected and influenced on a global scale. International education has played an important role in this interconnected web of humanity; however, there is still much progress to be made given the significant issues people are facing around the world. These issues range from ongoing conflicts that have led to violence and unrest to natural disasters that have caused food and water shortages for millions around the globe. Economic insecurity and disparity continue to plague many nations.

As international educators, we believe that, in addition to national-level commerce and politics, the international exchange of people and ideas on a personal level is required to develop solutions to these complex global challenges. Cross-cultural experiences and dialogue challenge people to consider that their own context is not universal and that people from other contexts often have very different views on similar issues. At the same time, the interactions that are afforded through international education allow participants to humanize others and expand their compassion and empathy for people around the world.
Through the exchange of ideas and the explorations of commonalities and differences, international education can support the generation of new initiatives to resolve intractable problems globally and help to develop responsible and globally minded citizens. We need to continue to advocate for and fine-tune the scholarship and pedagogy in international education to inspire and facilitate the education of tomorrow’s problem solvers.

**Careers in International Education**

In a burgeoning discipline like international education, there are many sectors of focus, kinds of jobs, geographic options, and graduate and professional development programs that offer possible courses of study. The world needs well-trained international educators, individuals who know firsthand the importance of learning about and across difference, who believe in their heart and mind that a peaceful world is possible, and who are ready to do their part to make it all happen.

Do these topics resonate with you? Do your personal values align with a world built on an appreciation of difference and understanding? Would you like to have a job that involves interculturalism, strategic thinking, relationship building, training, team collaboration, knowledge generation, and program design, just to name a few possible responsibilities? If so, then a career in international education may be the right path for you. This book is designed for individuals who want to be involved in working for positive change, equitable access and opportunity, cross-cultural understanding, and global partnerships.

**Overview of the Book**

*Careers in International Education: A Guide for New Professionals* is divided into three sections to break down the career planning process into manageable segments. Section I, “Professional Performance and Understanding of Self,” places you at the center of the journey. Chapter 1 lays out guidance on ways that you can obtain information about careers in international education, including internships and mentorships. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the field, with an eye to the wide range of career paths and jobs that are possible in international education. Chapter 3 turns inward, introducing you to an Action Plan to assist you in articulating your professional interests, skills, and goals. In chapter 4, this exploration continues with a deeper dive into the NAFSA *International Education Professional Competencies*™. Chapter 5 wraps up this first section by identifying the connections that you can build across your institution for the advancement of international education.

Section II of the book, “Practical Tools and Resources for the Job Seeker,” introduces valuable resources and information to help you take action and start your career journey. Chapter 6 reviews ways to get involved in international education even before obtaining your first job, such as engaging with professional associations, community-based
organizations, and advocacy efforts. Chapter 7 explores the kinds of credentials you can obtain in the field, including nondegree certificates, master’s degrees, doctorates, and opportunities for lifelong learning. In chapter 8, you gain an understanding of practical tools and tips for career advancement. This chapter reviews best practices for cover letters, résumé preparation, interviews, and salary negotiations.

The final section of the book, “Taking the Next Steps,” returns to the Action Plan and helps you pull together all of the pieces. It includes a discussion of ethical considerations and some closing thoughts about the future of international education.

Features of the Book

*Careers in International Education* is not just about getting that first job, but instead is designed to help you plan for the first 5 or so years of your career. To offer different perspectives, reflections from many international educators across the field are included so that you can build on the experiences of others. These “Voices from the Field” comprise personal stories and lessons learned that can help guide you as you discover new career progressions and determine how you can take your previous expertise and broaden it to other parts of the field. You will also find additional resources for your further consideration at the end of each chapter.

To help you contextualize and apply these insights to your own career planning process, each chapter includes Action Plan exercises that bridge the theoretical to the practical. A complete version of the Action Plan is also provided at the end of the book when you are ready to see the entire process at once.

With this in mind, we are honored to be a part of the journey in which you plan your professional development, and we hope that this book is helpful as you begin a career in international education.

About the Authors

As professionals with a combined total of 57 years of experience in international education, we were honored when NAFSA: Association of International Educators invited us to coauthor this volume. We knew each other previously from attending international education-related events in the past but had not collaborated closely. Once we agreed to work on this book together, we quickly learned that we have much in common, as well as different perspectives to offer. We both have academic training in international education, but one of us has built a career predominantly as a faculty member (Sora) and the other predominantly as an administrator (Amir). We both studied abroad in college, but we grew up in different places (Sora in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and Amir in Iran, Switzerland, Niger, and the New England region of the United States). We are both affiliated with small institutions in New England, but we each specialize in a different discipline (education and entrepreneurship,
respectively). Here are our stories so that you can understand our journeys and how we came to the perspectives that influenced our work on this book.

**Sora’s Story**

Little did I know that when, as a high school sophomore, I attended my first international club meeting, my career path was being set in motion. Through my experience with the club, I found that I loved developing programs for exchange students, running domestic exchanges for my high school, and befriending international students. I then had my first international sojourn between high school and college when I was welcomed as a member of my host family for 10 weeks in La Paz, Bolivia, on an exchange program organized by AFS-USA. The time abroad gave me an opportunity to begin to learn what real difference was and how it affected my worldview.

Why Bolivia? At that time, participants didn’t choose where they wanted to go; they were placed somewhere in the world by the exchange program. When I first heard that I would be spending my summer in Bolivia, I thought it was an island in the Caribbean! Clearly, if anyone needed a global education, it was me. I lacked a sense of maturity and exposure to the world as a young adult, and when I think back to some of the things I said and did as a 17-year-old away from home for the first time, I am embarrassed by my naïveté and ignorance. I am, however, also impressed by just how open-minded that 17-year-old girl was and how willing she was to try most anything. That summer, while I had no vision of where my path would take me, I fell in love with what would become my future, the world of international education.

**Higher Education**

My obsession with international exchange continued into college: my freshman year, I visited the study abroad office to start planning for my junior year abroad! When I discovered that the student worker in the office had also been an AFS exchange student, I immediately felt like I had found my new home, my place in a school with 40,000 students. Apparently, the director of the office appreciated my enthusiasm because 2 weeks later, he found funding to allow me to join the staff as another student worker. I worked in that office for the next 3 years, only taking a break to spend my junior year studying politics and Spanish in Bogotá, Colombia.

I continued to volunteer for AFS throughout college and, 6 months after graduation, when a professional position opened at AFS’s headquarters in New York, I jumped at the chance to get paid to do what I already loved doing as a volunteer. I enjoyed learning about exchange program management during my time with AFS, but I eventually left to pursue my master’s degree at the School for International Training (SIT) so that I could develop an academic foundation and deepen my understanding of the field. After 6 months of intense
coursework, I completed a yearlong internship with New England College’s branch campus in Arundel, England, working with both U.S. students studying abroad for a semester or year and international students pursuing their full bachelor’s degree over a four-year stay in England.

**Cultural Differences**

Once again, I was challenged to learn about difference—in two profoundly divergent ways. Through my professional experience, because most of my colleagues were British, I quickly learned that while the United States and England may share many elements of a common language, of course, the cultures are completely different. Even after living in Bolivia and Colombia and having studied intercultural adjustment and communication in graduate school, I still committed more cultural faux pas than I care to remember. I also experienced the hardest jolt of cultural adjustment of the three experiences because of my erroneous assumptions that language equivalency equated to cultural equivalency.

On the more personal level, having been raised in a completely Jewish community in Baltimore, Maryland, it was as if the universe wanted to test my intercultural skills when it had me fall in love with someone from Saudi Arabia.

I eventually became comfortable in both situations as I realized the value in asking questions, looking for connections, and bracketing my assumptions about difference. From my internship experience, I gained friendships that are now decades long, and while the romantic relationship was much shorter, I learned that the underlying cultural values and practices of family, food, and loyalty are shared across many religions and cultures. I also realized that I was capable of a strength the likes of which I had never been aware.

**Career Path**

I returned to the United States and spent 17 years in Washington, D.C., managing various international exchange programs with two nonprofit organizations. In each organization, I received mentoring and support from my supervisors. Every 3 years or so, I was promoted to a new position with increasing responsibility. I learned about different kinds of exchanges, the politics of public sector funding, the challenges of working in high-pressure environments, and the value of having both diverse colleagues who you can trust and mentors who understand the importance of developing their staff.

I eventually returned to school part time to pursue my doctorate and, upon passing my comprehensive exams, I left full-time work to complete my dissertation in cultural studies at George Mason University and to teach part time there and at SIT. I was fortunate to have a committee of advisers who respected each other and wanted me to be successful. From them, I learned how to balance a push for excellence (what they asked of me) with compassionate advising (what they offered in return). I completed my PhD 12 years after starting it and was then hired by SIT full time to teach others about the career that I had
been a part of for 20 years. I still feel lucky that I am able to combine my content expertise and my love of teaching into one position.

**Lifelong Learning**

Now, after several years of polishing my higher education teaching and administration skills at SIT, I still seek out opportunities to continue my learning and service. I am an active volunteer with NAFSA, focusing on programs that support professional development and scholarship, such as the Academy for International Education, Trainer Corps, and the leadership teams of New England’s Region XI and the national-level Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship Knowledge Community. I present at various conferences throughout the year, including NAFSA's annual and regional gatherings, The Forum on Education Abroad, Diversity Abroad, Lessons From Abroad, and the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research, on matters related to professional development and leadership. I continue to conduct research on topics that are of interest to me, most recently studying the degree to which the field is achieving gender parity. To stay current on trends in the field, I serve on international education-related boards and as a peer reviewer for several journals. The career that started by chance in that high school meeting has given me memories, friendships, challenges, learning, self-awareness, and a level of satisfaction I never could have imagined at that time!

**Amir’s Story**

When I reflect on what inspired me to pursue a career in international education, I think back to my childhood. I grew up on four continents: I was born in Iran, lived briefly in Switzerland, and then moved to Niger, where I went to an American school and learned English. I came to the United States for high school and college and have resided in the New England area for most of my life. My cultural context has constantly been from a position of being “in between,” which has been a driving factor in my passion for mobility and engagement across nations, languages, and cultures.

**Childhood Background**

My childhood was very much impacted by war. The force of war is one that denies morality, respect, and love—and with these, war denies humanity. My memories of war stand in stark contrast to my undergraduate years as an international student, where, at any given gathering of my friends, at least five countries were represented and we would engage in the most heated international debates. Our words were fierce, yet at the end of the day, we respected and even loved one another. The deep sense of humanity in the room was above all conflict. Here was a microcosm that focused on the universal things that united us instead of the particular things that separated us. I believe that international
education facilitates an important dynamic of sharing and understanding that fosters the peacemakers of today and the future.

**Higher Education**

During my undergraduate studies, I was connected to the international office at my institution and began working with students who participated in the English as a second language (ESL) program. Upon graduation, I had the chance to do this work full time. Through this role, I was introduced to NAFSA and other regional international education meetings. My engagement with those I met at the meetings and the staff at the international office inspired me to explore a career in international student advising. However, I quickly learned that there is a lot of competition for these positions and that knowledge of immigration regulations and advising experience is a must. In addition, many of the candidates competing for advising positions had earned their master’s degrees; thus, I returned to school to obtain my master’s in higher education administration.

In the meantime, I worked as a graduate assistant at the Intensive English Institute and interned at the international office, supporting different international student activities. The combination of my classroom learning about student development theories, the practical and administrative experience I gained in coordinating activities for ESL students, and the hands-on learning I acquired at the international office provided me with a solid foundation to work in higher education internationalization efforts. I must say that 20 years on, I still draw from those foundational experiences and learning.

**Career Path**

Upon completing my master’s program, I began working as an international student and scholar adviser. I enjoyed engaging with the students and scholars, supporting their intercultural adjustment, and learning about the complexity of immigration regulations. At the same time, I became increasingly involved with NAFSA, attending meetings, presenting at conferences and workshops, and, ultimately, joining the regional leadership team. These experiences and challenges helped me to grow professionally, and I eventually moved into a managerial role within international student and scholar services.

After a few years, I was presented with the opportunity to become an academic adviser and I decided to leave international education. In reality, however, I knew that I would continue to be connected to international education through my work as an academic adviser and through my professional and personal networks.

A few years later, I took on a new role as assistant dean of student affairs. This role exposed me to a variety of administrative responsibilities that furthered my knowledge of student development theories and leadership in the face of difficult circumstances. It was during this time that I sensed that I needed to decide how I wished to shape the rest of my
career in higher education, and I knew that international education was still a significant part of my identity. After much contemplation, I joined a doctoral program with a focus in international higher education. Going to school part time while I worked full time meant slow progress, but I was determined to keep going. The doctoral program taught me new theories, expanded my networks, and strengthened my analytical, evaluative, and research skills. The faculty in my program have become lifelong mentors, and I continue to draw from the lessons they shared with us, their students.

Before completing my PhD, I had the opportunity to return to international education at the senior level. In this new role, I was responsible for a comprehensive international office and an office devoted to student diversity and inclusion. As I continued to pursue my PhD and manage a large office, I relied on the dedication and hard work of so many colleagues who helped me push forward the important mission of international and multicultural education.

After completing my PhD, my responsibilities as a senior international officer grew and I found myself driving many of the institution-wide international initiatives. I also became increasingly involved in researching students’ outcomes of internationalization, presenting at conferences, writing articles, and joining editorial boards. I was asked to join advisory boards abroad, which broadened my understanding of the complexities of international education in settings as varied as China, Germany, and Tanzania.

My career trajectory has been full of failures and successes, ups and down, and many doubts along the way. I was extremely fortunate to encounter some remarkable educators who went out of their way to mentor me, give me opportunities, and genuinely take an interest in my success. These relationships, and the opportunities I had within and outside of the field of international education, have prepared me to become a better manager, strategic planner, and mentor to others. Yet, as I pursue my daily work and the multitude of responsibilities that I face, it is easy to lose sight of what drew me to the profession. I have to intentionally pause and reflect on what first attracted me to the field and what drives me now. Therefore, as you get going in your career, remember that it is easy to lose sight of the big picture. You must find the time to zoom out and remind yourself of the reasons why you decided to devote your time, energy, and skills to this profession.

As you can see, one of the most significant commonalities that the two of us share is that we have been involved in the field for all our adult lives. It is part of our identities and one of the core elements of our individual life experiences. We now consider mentoring as a critical piece of our work, whether formally through educational programs like the ones we teach, or informally with colleagues in our offices, our committees and professional associations, and around the country and the world. We know the responsibilities and rewards of working in international education, and we hope to see many others benefit from this incredible work.