



**Session 537**  
**Students at the Margins and the Institutions that Serve Them:**  
**A Global Perspective**

**October 11-16, 2014**  
**Salzburg, Austria**

**Why this topic and why now?**

One of the fundamental responsibilities of higher education is to provide open and equal opportunities for students to learn, succeed, and positively contribute to their local, national, and global societies. Great strides are being made in increasing educational access, retention completion, and success, yet there is still work to be done particularly for students from disadvantaged or marginalized groups. Unprecedented shifts in migration patterns are causing demographic changes around the world. Additionally, governments, societies, and higher education institutions are increasingly recognizing the need and responsibility to create legal and institutional frameworks for providing more and better opportunities for people from historically marginalized groups to gain access and achieve success at the university level.

A brief global scan shows that some countries and regions have a longer history of colleges and universities serving the specific needs of marginalized groups while developments in others are just underway.

For example: In the United States, “Minority Serving Institutions” (MSIs), including Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Asian American & Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, are a firmly established and important part of the educational landscape. South Africa’s “Historically Disadvantaged Institutions” are folded in to the larger higher education system but they have not received equitable funding and are considered sub-par by many in the country. Universities Australia is a consortium of universities that advocates for, among other things, addressing issues of indigenous disadvantage in Australia (Universities Australia, 2012). As part of its effort to shift access to higher education from elitism to universalism, the Chinese government has established higher education institutions for specific ethnic minorities and introduced preferential policies giving ethnic minorities “bonus points” in the entrance exams that determine which higher education institutions students can attend (Zhu, 2010). Brazilian legislators recently passed the “Law of Social Quotas” for the nation’s public universities requiring all 59 public universities in the country to reserve half of all new entries for students from Brazilian public schools (where the majority of students are of African descent) and reserve half of these spots (i.e. 25% of the total) for people of indigenous ancestry in “numbers proportional to their relative populations within each state” (Hernandez, 2012).

These represent just a few examples. Higher education institutions committed to providing educational opportunities for local communities marginalized along ethnic, racial, religious or other lines can be found on every continent. What’s more, in light of shifting demographics and the growing focus on

educational opportunity and access, increasing numbers of colleges and universities will be serving students from marginalized groups. For too long, institutions serving students at the margins have operated in a vacuum, failing to collaborate across institutional types and across nations. This Salzburg session will bring together leaders from institutions serving marginalized populations with policy makers and researchers to develop a platform for finding solutions to these institutions' common challenges and capitalizing on their strengths.

### **Session goals and key questions**

Participants will come together to:

- Develop a taxonomy and database for institutions serving marginalized populations worldwide in order to serve as a common reference point for more efficiently and effectively facilitating the generation and sharing of knowledge, research, and practices among these institutions;
- Create a global network of individuals and institutions interested in understanding the practical implications of issues such as affirmative action, student learning, degree attainment, financial support and fundraising, culturally relevant curricula, gender parity, sexuality, institutional leadership, faculty governance and voice;
- Stimulate fresh thinking on how colleges and universities can most effectively provide educational opportunities to disadvantaged or marginalized people;
- Develop a framework for data collection to be used by institutions around the world allowing for comparative data analysis in order to advocate for and make more informed policy and financial decisions; and
- Work to find practical ways to solve common challenges faced by students at the margins, including access, degree attainment, developmental education, etc.
- Uncover the common and individual successes experienced by institutions serving students at the margins, sharing strategies and best practices with majority communities that are beginning to reach out to these students.

Specific themes to be addressed include gaining a better understanding of:

- the financial resources of institutions serving marginalized populations, including the extent and level of resources these institutions have, whom benefits from them, and from where they come
- student learning and development, including academic preparation prior to college, characteristics of academic and personal development, and preparedness for post-college education and employment; and
- faculty supply and development issues
- current and future leadership

### **Session format**

The session will bring together 60 top practitioners, scholars, and leaders from around the world including college and university leaders as well as policy decision makers. Leading researchers and practitioners will develop short thought-papers in advance of the session addressing common cross-cutting issues that institutions serving marginalized communities face and innovative approaches to addressing these issues. While in Salzburg, participants will discuss the most pressing issues that they collectively face and, drawing upon the diversity of experience and knowledge, develop innovative ways to address them that span national and institutional borders. Salzburg's intimate setting creates a space for openness in which participants can tackle complex issues and talk frankly.

### **Impact**

The session will create a global network for ongoing dialogue. Currently no such dialogue is taking place. The essays written prior to the session and key findings from the session will form the basis for a report that will outline a framework for continued research and exchange surrounding this topic. The report will

be published via the recently launched Center for Minority Serving Institutions at the University of Pennsylvania. The report, other findings from the session, and the global network will serve as a valuable resource for individuals and organizations interested in improving educational access, success and achievement including governments, foundations, think tanks, and entrepreneurs. The findings from and network created by this session will also advance the research underway at the aforementioned Center for Minority Serving Institutions which is explicitly focuses on furthering higher education for underrepresented populations.

### **The Partners**

Since 1947, the [Salzburg Global Seminar](#) has brought together 25,000 participants from over 150 countries and territories for more than 500 programs in Schloss Leopoldskron, Austria, and beyond. Education has always been a core value of SGS and it has convened sessions focused on educational equity, efficiency, and justice for decades. Through its work on the Universities Project in the 1990's and early 2000's SGS played a crucial role in educational policy reform in former Soviet countries and more recently it just completed a series of sessions on *Optimizing Talent: Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide* in partnership with Educational Testing Service. The Seminar has a name and network among higher education experts as well as experience in bringing together emerging and established leaders and innovators across national, cultural and professional boundaries to forge creative strategies for shared problems.

[Educational Testing Service](#) has a long-time commitment to increasing access and success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to having partnered with the Salzburg Global Seminar and supporting the establishment of the Center for Minority Serving Institutions, ETS is committed to raising the profile of those institutions that serve minority populations worldwide and creating opportunities for the student served.

In the beginning of 2014, Marybeth Gasman launched the [Center for Minority Serving Institutions](#) at the University of Pennsylvania. This first of a kind Center brings together researchers and practitioners from across the spectrum of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to harness the collective strengths of these institutions and to solve the challenges they face. An integral part of American higher education, MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Tribal Colleges and Universities; Hispanic Serving Institutions; and Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander Serving Institutions. Among the Center's goals are to elevate the educational contributions of MSIs, ensuring their participation in national and international conversations; to increase rigorous scholarship on MSIs; and to bolster the efforts of MSIs to close educational achievement gaps and assessment performance of disadvantaged communities.