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## Interview with Brian Whalen

EnglishUSA

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***What do you like to do in your free time?***

Play guitar, mountain hike, bird watch, observe and enjoy nature, make rustic furniture, watch baseball, play basketball, listen to live music, explore local historical sites, talk with neighbors, travel to Greece and Ecuador to visit my children, share life and thoughts with my wife.

***How did you meet your spouse/significant other?***

In the college library I asked Annmarie if I could help her do the NY Times crossword. She said, "why yes, I could use some help." Little did I know that she was a crossword wiz and that 8 down would connect with 17 across for 40 happy years and counting.

***If you could go back and give your 18-year-old Brian one piece of advice, what would it be?***

Don't give up hope: the Red Sox will be World Series Champions one day.

***What's on your bedside table/Kindle?***

Forest Walking by Peter Wohlleben; Why Time Begins on Opening Day by Thomas Boswell; The Painting, a novel by a friend, Michael Reid.

***When did you first hear about AIRC? What attracted you?***

I've known about AIRC since it was founded in

2008 and have always admired the people in its professional community. I was attracted first and foremost by the opportunity to work with the staff, Board and AIRC members. Second, I was attracted to the mission of helping to make the enrollment experience a positive one for all international students. And third, I thought my association leadership experience and skills were a good match for this stage of AIRC's growth.

***How has serving as Executive Director of AIRC changed you?***

I started at AIRC during the pandemic when operations had transitioned to a virtual office with staff working remotely. I did not meet many colleagues face-to-face until over a year after I started on the job. Nonetheless, we have accomplished so much together and have adjusted to this new way of working online. The experience has given me a deeper appreciation for how our work is shaped primarily by the content of what we do, and not by the processes we use to create the content. The mission and goals that we have, and the programs and resources that we create to fulfill them, are what remain most important. My takeaway is that we will always adjust our work processes to create the content, and not the other way around.

***What's one thing working with AIRC that you didn't expect?***

After working as an international educator for the past 40 years (!), I should have expected that my AIRC work would mean developing close friendships with colleagues with whom I work. I consider this the main perk of working in the international education field. We may think that international travel is the real bonus of working in international education. But it really is the people whom we meet and with whom we become close that is the real advantage of working in our field.

International travel makes that possible, so I guess travel and friendships go hand in hand. In any case, if we work in this field, we develop genuine friendships. That has been a true gift of my working for AIRC.

***Who has been your most important professional mentor?***

Tim Perkins, a true international education pioneer, who is now retired and living in France. Tim has taught me so much and has supported me throughout my career. He is a touchstone for wisdom, perspective, and joy. 30+ years ago when he was Boston University's Vice President for International Programs, Tim hired me to direct BU's Italian Center in Padova, Italy. After spending 5 years in Italy, I told him my family and I were ready to move back to the U.S. He threw out the option of my staying in Italy to direct the program, but I told him that we had made up our mind to return stateside. He immediately offered me a position at BU's Boston campus. I asked him what the position would be like. He said, "I'm not sure, but we'll make it up." I said yes, and the rest is history. From the beginning, Tim had a lot of faith in me, and I've tried to remember in my mentoring relationships that having faith in a person is paramount.

***What do you think other people should know about AIRC?***

AIRC is such a unique association because of its quality assurance role and because of the diversity of its membership. Because it is recognized by the U.S. Department of Justice as a Standards Development Organization, AIRC is obligated to follow a collegial, open, transparent, and balanced process in developing and promoting standards for the international student recruitment and enrollment field. The goal of this work is to help ensure that every international student has an ethical, positive recruitment and

enrollment experience. Not many membership associations have this standards-based role. It is precisely because of this that AIRC members represent the diversity of entities involved in the field, from educational recruitment agencies to secondary and higher education institutions to entities that provide other services that support international recruitment and enrollment. What attracts this diverse collection of entities to join AIRC is the opportunity to shape the field together by creating the very standards that members pledge to uphold.

***What do you consider your greatest achievement?***

As a professional I would say being involved in helping to shape two distinct international education sectors through leading two membership associations that are also Standards Development Organizations - AIRC and The Forum on Education Abroad. I've been fortunate to be able to work closely with so many smart and dedicated colleagues on both the outbound and inbound sides of the international education coin to develop standards to create the foundations and architecture of these sectors.

***What's one lesson that you have learned in your career that you think everyone should know?***

The first thing that comes to mind is the importance of valuing and respecting everyone's perspective. A decision that is informed by the collective wisdom of diverse views and perspectives is likely to lead to a much better outcome. This is especially important in the international education field, which is an enterprise that involves a rich diversity of people and viewpoints.

***Where will our profession be 10 years from now?***

We will see greater personalized customization of educational journeys, something I wrote about four years ago - [IIE Networker \(IIEB\) - Fall 2019 - Personalized Education Abroad: Putting Students at the Center \(iienetworker-digital.com\)](https://www.iienetworker.com/2019/10/Personalized-Education-Abroad-Putting-Students-at-the-Center/). Traditional degree programs will not be the common way we think about credentials. Instead, student learning will encompass an enormously wide variety of discrete learning experiences over a lifetime and be available on demand when and where people need them. As education professionals who support these student journeys, our jobs will become more complex. We will have to learn about and understand a much greater variety of educational options that support students throughout their lifespans. At the same time, we will have to advise and support individual students as they follow a distinctive pathway that is unique to them.

***What's the thing that motivates you to go to work every day?***

The pleasure of working with smart, interesting colleagues and knowing that our work together makes a difference in improving international student educational journeys. Even though association work is most often a step or two removed from the life of individual students, I know that what I do daily does ultimately benefit international students. That is an honor and a privilege and provides huge motivation.

***How did you decide to be a teacher/administrator/etc.***

As an undergraduate I became a serious student and knew that I wanted to pursue a PhD. I did my degree in an interdisciplinary program in psychology, literature, and philosophy. That prepared me well for a career

in the academy. When I was offered a job as resident director of a campus in Rome, Italy I taught and oversaw the administration of the program, from academic affairs to student life to facilities. I loved being involved in all aspects of teaching and learning, both in and outside of the classroom, and that is something I have been fortunate to do throughout my career.

***What occupation (other than your own) would you like to try?***

An itinerant street musician. As a substitute, I can be heard on YouTube and at Open Mic nights.

***What podcasts you'd recommend audience and why?***

I don't listen to podcasts but can recommend something that my wife turned me on to. Check out Radiogarden.com It allows one to listen to radio stations from around the world. I have always loved radio, in part because it can be an interesting window into communities and cultures. You're welcome!

***What was your COVID hobby that you still do now?***

I became an avid hiker before COVID, but it became even more of a hobby during COVID because my regular basketball game was on hiatus. This year I have a goal of hiking a total of 1,000 miles and 250,000 feet of elevation. I am on pace to make it!

