



## 2024 Executive Board Election Candidate

### Representative to the Executive Board

**Name:** Sonia Soni

**Title:** Head - Career Guidance Counselor & Psychology Faculty - International Curriculum

**Institution:** Aditya Birla World Academy

**Location/Region:** India/South & Central Asia

**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.** Since 2016, my involvement with International ACAC has been transformative, beginning as a member and culminating in serving on the board from 2021 onwards, assuming various crucial roles. As the leader of the bursary committee, I collaborated closely with the VP (Finance) to ensure equitable financial support for members, actively contributing to the association's financial sustainability aligned with its mission. Chairing the 2022 Conference Session Review & Selection Committee, my responsibilities included overseeing the rigorous evaluation process, ensuring a diverse and engaging lineup addressing key topics in international education. My roles in the First Timers Committee and as a mentor reflect a commitment to creating a positive and inclusive experience for new participants, as well as guiding individuals through one-on-one interactions to foster personal and career growth. Lastly, as a member of the committee involved in hiring the Executive Director, I actively participated in the selection process,

showcasing a deep understanding of the organization's needs and a commitment to ensuring alignment with International ACAC's mission and goals, both as a visionary and a strategic leader. This comprehensive engagement underscores my dedication to the association's mission and my commitment to collaborative growth in the international education space.

**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.**

Hailing from the vibrant cultural canvas of India, I fervently advocate for the equity over equality and consider 'student centric best fit' as a base step to creating lifelong learners. As a zealous volunteer for International ACAC, my strategic endeavors navigated through India's intricate educational landscape (having diverse curriculums like CBSE, ICSE, state boards, IB etc). Through targeted initiatives such as webinars and collaborations with local institutions, our mission aimed to bridge information gaps by showcasing opportunity path, rendering International ACAC's wealth of resources accessible across stakeholders operating in varied settings within India's expansive cultural and economic diversity. Emphasizing the importance of tailoring approaches to the unique needs and challenges of diverse groups, I aspire to dismantle systemic inequalities impeding access to higher education and continue working on increasing outreach. In my role within International ACAC, I spearhead initiatives promoting cultural competency, curate resources for equitable admissions, and fervently advocate for policies reflecting these principles. This commitment significantly contributes to nurturing a more just, inclusive, and globally connected international education community, transcending borders and fostering a transformative impact on educational access and opportunities.

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

In my capacity as the Head of College Counselling at Aditya Birla World Academy (ABWA) and The Aditya Birla Integrated School (TABIS), I have spearheaded transformative initiatives in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ). At ABWA, I oversee admissions and counseling, emphasizing diversity and optimal student fits. In contrast, at TABIS, the focus is on tailored paths for students with special needs, advocating for equity. This dual leadership role has honed my adaptability to

community-specific needs, fostering collaboration and team efforts for effective stakeholder engagement. The commitment to DEIJ principles is central to these endeavors, reflecting not just professional duty but a personal dedication to student and family well-being. My strategic roles with the College Board and the University of Toronto offer insights into the global education landscape, highlighting the imperative for inclusivity. Leadership roles within the International Baccalaureate, coupled with involvement in International ACAC, position me to contribute valuable expertise to global discussions on education standards, curriculum design, and counseling practices. Engaging with International ACAC will provide a broader understanding of global higher education admissions, fostering a mutually beneficial platform for counselors. These synergies hold the potential for collaborative innovation, shaping the future of college admission counseling on a global scale.

**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.**

International ACAC transcends being a mere organization; it stands as a global platform dedicated to consistently championing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) within the international education community. This unique entity unites counselors, Independent Educational Consultants (IEC), and educators worldwide, driven by a shared commitment to students' well-being and guiding them to their 'best fit.' As a volunteer representing South East Asia, especially India, my passion lies in extending the reach of this exceptional community. I envision my role as an agent of change, with a particular focus on championing "equity." I am dedicated to ensuring that every student, regardless of background, enjoys equitable access to educational opportunities and resources. This goal necessitates various outreach programs, forums for shared challenges and experiences, documentation of best practices, and, crucially, fostering a culture of resource sharing. By actively engaging in and leading such initiatives, I aspire to contribute to establishing a more just and equitable landscape in international education. Through these efforts, my aim is to cultivate a community that plays a pivotal role in shaping the future and nurturing students who are 'glocal'—able to embrace global diversity while respecting local roots—and instill a lifelong commitment to learning, making them true 'global citizens.'

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

My leadership philosophy at International ACAC is grounded in the principles of transparent communication, active collaboration, and genuine empathy. I recognize that the strength of our volunteer committee lies in the diverse talents and perspectives of its members. Through open and regular communication channels, I ensure that every volunteer is informed about our objectives, progress, and any pertinent updates, fostering a shared sense of purpose. Collaboration is nurtured by providing platforms for idea exchange, actively seeking input, and leveraging the unique strengths of each member. Emphasizing empathy, I make a concerted effort to understand the individual needs, aspirations, and challenges of each volunteer, creating a supportive environment where everyone feels valued. This commitment to recognizing and appreciating the diverse contributions of our team enhances morale and reinforces a collective commitment to the mission of International ACAC. Ultimately, by fostering a culture of communication, collaboration, and empathy, I aim to lead a volunteer committee that not only achieves its objectives but also provides a fulfilling and enriching experience for every member.

**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.**

Since 2016, my involvement with International ACAC has been extensive, initially as a member and later, in 2021, as a Board member with diverse responsibilities. Leading the bursary committee, I collaborated closely with the VP (Finance), ensuring equitable financial support for members and actively contributing to the association's financial sustainability, aligning with its mission. As the Chair of the 2022 Conference Session Review & Selection Committee, I oversaw the meticulous evaluation and selection process, curating diverse and engaging sessions that addressed key topics in international education. Simultaneously, my role on the First Timers Committee involved welcoming and orienting new participants, ensuring a positive and inclusive experience for first-time attendees within the International ACAC community. In the capacity of a mentor, I provided guidance and support through one-on-one interactions, sharing experiences and insights to foster personal and career growth. Additionally, as a member of the committee

responsible for hiring the Executive Director, I actively participated in the selection process, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the organization's needs and a commitment to ensuring the chosen candidate aligned with International ACAC's mission and goals as both a visionary and a strategic leader.

**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.**

My professional trajectory and transitioning from a clinical psychologist to a career counsellor in response to a recognized gap in career guidance in young and developing India signifies a shift from exploring individual psychology intricacies to guiding students in identifying their "best-fit" paths. In diverse roles like an IB teacher, workshop leader, SVTL, and consultant for the DP and CP, I showcased versatility and unwavering commitment to continual personal and professional growth. Overcoming initial setbacks, my selection and experiences thereof became catalysts for upskilling, driven by a deep-seated belief and passion for student centricity. Contributions extend to honorary roles with organizations like UFT, CIALFO etc underscore a dedication to crafting tailored paths for students. Career counselling and upskilling workshop in association with NGOs (like UNOCUQ) for students in rural India connects me to the section needing inclusion and resources the most. Advisory responsibilities with UFT demonstrate my leadership acumen in steering organizations toward success through strategic decision-making. In essence, my professional narrative is one of positive transformation, marked by an enduring commitment to equity and inclusivity, resonating with both student development and broader institutional objectives in the field of counselling and education.

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

I am excited to nominate myself for the position of Representative to the Executive Board for International ACAC, driven by a fervent desire to contribute actively to the strategic direction of this organization. My extensive experience in counselling equips me with a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the international education community. This position, with its pivotal role in decision-making and policy formulation, aligns seamlessly with my commitment to fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation within the field. I am eager to

leverage my skills in strategic planning and transparent communication to advance the mission of International ACAC on a global scale. As a dedicated advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion, I am poised to champion these principles within the Executive Board, ensuring a holistic and representative approach to shaping the future of international college admission counselling. With the desire to ensure greater outreach, for creating a platform which enables resource / knowledge sharing, highlighting the best practises, synergizing joint working towards challenge resolution in a diverse setting ; I volunteer for this leadership role.