



## 2025 Regional Council Election Candidate

### Region 1

**Name:** Danika Pierce

**Professional Title:** University Counsellor

**Institution/Organization:** St. Joseph's Institution International

**Country of Residence:** Singapore

**Member Group:** Secondary (High School)

### Applicant Questions

**Explain your motivation for pursuing a leadership role with International ACAC, as well as why this position in particular. Highlight how your leadership experience and involvement with the organization make you a strong fit for the role..**

It is my belief that a Regional Council should do more than represent our members. It should support collaboration, encourage fresh ideas and build community across borders. In January 2022, after seven years in US university admissions at UCLA and UConn, I transitioned to St. Joseph's Institution International in Singapore. This feels like the right moment, both personally and professionally, to take on a leadership role with InternationalACAC.

From my experience of working at bicoastal, large public universities in the United States with students from around the world, to my role at an international secondary school with over 60% Singaporean students and a Lasallian mission, I bring a distinct perspective that bridges the gap I believe the Regional Council is looking to fill. This excites me because it offers room for creativity, ingenuity and the chance to implement innovative, regionally relevant ideas, while integrating my professional experiences and strengths.

My three years on the InternationalACAC Finance Committee (2021-2024) provided insight into the organisation's structure and interworkings, supporting a strong understanding of its principles and priorities. As Co-Chair of the Opportunity Grants Committee, I oversaw the disbursement of more than \$40,000 USD in funding and led the committee to select five

deserving recipients annually, positively impacting thousands of students' access to higher education.

The two years I had the privilege to spend as a Mentor in the Mentor/Mentee Programme with counsellors in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and Hubei, China, contributed significantly to deep connections and supported professional development and growth across culture, a parallel to the community-building essential for this role.

In addition, my contribution as a Pre-Conference Faculty Member for International ACCAC and my presentations on ethics, data and holistic admissions at the most recent conference have allowed me to share best practices and better understand members' needs. This, paired with my role on the GUCC Conference Planning Committee, service on the IB UCC Advisory Group, and regular presentations at CIS EARCOS, reflects my commitment to advancing international education, advocacy and collaboration across diverse professional communities.

**Drawing from your previous experience in volunteering and leadership, how have these roles equipped you with the skills and insights necessary for the Founding Regional Representative position? Please highlight your leadership philosophy and strategies for effectively managing and leading a volunteer committee, with a focus on communication, collaboration, and recognition. Additionally, share specific accomplishments that demonstrate your ability to build professional communities, mentor emerging leaders, and promote inclusive and culturally responsive practices—key responsibilities of this role.**

My leadership philosophy is centred on encouraging a sense of purpose, building trust and creating an environment where individuals feel supported, valued and empowered to contribute their unique strengths. My leadership in organising large-scale virtual and in-person events, from UCLA's inaugural Virtual Fall Open House to international counsellor networking sessions, has built my capacity to manage teams and sustain engagement.

My commitment to community building is reflected through my support of Umoja Tanzania in June 2025. I contributed to the mission of improving youth development by running workshops for students and faculty. Ahead of the trip, I reached out to local university counsellors, which resulted in collaborative support, resource sharing and positive engagement across the educational community. This experience reinforced my belief that connections and shared purpose drive impact.

As Co-Chair of the IntlACAC Opportunity Grants Committee, I advocated for and implemented an anonymised review process, removing identifying details to ensure equitable assessment. I sought to have applications that were assessed on merit and free from unconscious bias. I also proactively improved diversity in the committee members to better represent the global reach and align with the varied backgrounds of IntlACAC's membership.

In my role on the Conference Planning Committee for GUCC, I supported professional community building. I managed timely communications through the conference website, organised university visits to a diverse range of institutions in Singapore and created a WhatsApp group to sustain dialogue.

My dedication to equity and representation extends to my experience as a founding member

of UCLA UG Admissions 'Afrikan Diaspora Admissions Advocacy Committee (ADAAC)'. I helped organise and presented at events aimed at promoting awareness, accountability and accessibility. At UCLA, I also fostered international connections by starting a WeChat channel and creating and running a Discord Server, showcasing my ability to utilise different platforms for community engagement.

A recent US university visit prompted reflection on the term "community engagement." The definition - reciprocity, mutual respect, and collaborative efforts to advance collective well-being and the common good - aligns with how I envision leading in this role: bringing people together, valuing diverse perspectives, and working collectively.

**As a Founding Regional Representative for International ACAC, how would you outline your understanding of the role, including the priority areas you would focus on, your overall vision for the region, and the challenges you anticipate addressing? Additionally, what innovative solutions would you propose to strengthen all regional networks, enhance member engagement, and improve communication between members, the Council, and the Board, while acknowledging current practices or programs you find effective?**

My vision is grounded in community-building connections that extend across borders and oceans in support of students' transition to higher education. This means celebrating geographic diversity while ensuring members feel connected, heard and supported.

I see the role structured in three integrated yearly phases, encouraging member input, thoughtful planning and sustainable growth.

Year 1 begins with a foundational shared understanding of ethical considerations, as values can vary widely across cultures - a concept I discussed in a recent IntlACAC Pre-Conference ethics session, which reinforced the need for mutual understanding. I will collaborate to develop a concise, member-driven framework outlining shared values and context-specific considerations to guide programming and communication. Alongside this, a regional survey would identify which organisational resources members use, which they do not, and why. This will uncover gaps and opportunities for connection. Given the region's diversity, most events will be virtual, such as informal online chats and topic-based skill-sharing sessions. My background in designing high-participation virtual programming and sustaining online communities gives me the tools to make these initiatives accessible. A key focus will be identifying who is missing from the conversation and finding ways to include them, while also creating links to existing InternationalACAC programmes to ensure regional needs are met and global contributions are made.

Year 2 shifts to implementation. Initiatives will be regionally focused, delivered in our time zones and shaped by members' priorities. This stage also includes "sharing-in" and "sharing-out" opportunities. For example, university representatives from outside the region could present their higher education systems using regional case studies. Alternatively, schools could showcase national curricula to help admissions teams from outside the region understand grading systems and student strengths.

Year 3 is dedicated to reflection and sustainability. The region will assess what has worked, refine what has not and look to the future. This step welcomes new voices, maintains

progress and plans for leadership turnover.

Challenges will arise from the size and diversity of the region and the variety of member needs. These, however, offer opportunities for creativity and collaboration. By being intentional, the role can strengthen the network and leave a lasting impact.

**As a Founding Regional Representative, advocacy for international students is central to International ACAC's mission. Identify a critical issue in college admissions or international education that you would prioritize addressing in your region. Explain its significance, the potential impact on students and institutions, and how you would collaborate with regional and global stakeholders to drive meaningful change.**

Across the world, international students are often unfairly blamed for complex social issues, when in reality, they're also most affected by them. Geopolitical changes in policy, government and economics have a consistent impact on how international students navigate the university admissions process and experience higher education.

In the Regional Representative role, it's extremely important to consider the challenges of students in a global context and ensure our communities can support them with accurate, timely insight. The changes not only impact a student's admissions plans, but they can also heighten anxiety and reduce access to opportunities. Over the past year, I've supported a Burmese student forced to pivot from the US to the UK and Europe. The shift left us wondering how to recover not just the time, money and effort invested in the SAT, but most importantly, how to recover from a feeling of being unwelcome, as peers still explore the option she no longer has. Her situation is not unique; across the region and beyond, students are being redirected after years of preparation.

Higher education institutions are also being hit with the impact of geopolitical changes, facing reduced campus diversity, financial uncertainty, loss of perspectives in the classroom and challenges with enrolment. However, even more of a concern is the growing bubble of miscommunication. At the 2024 GUCC conference, I worked to counter this misinformation gap by inviting representatives from the Netherlands, UK, Australia, Japan, the US and Hong Kong to keynote and share concise global updates with the 250 participants. The conference attendees were also invited to engage further with the presenters throughout the remainder of the conference, replacing speculation and misleading information from news articles and social media.

How do we advocate, educate and support students and ourselves in this time or when faced with the 'blame' of geopolitical policy? A small step is to first identify the information that students and universities need regionally. Then we need to make it accessible. If one country's doors are closing, where are they opening, and how can we communicate that to those who need it most? By connecting accurate regional updates, such as quarterly regional briefs, with interested parties worldwide, we can help students and universities navigate uncertainty and maintain advocacy at our core.

**Explain how you would use this position to advance International ACAC's strategic plan by aligning your top three priorities with the organization's three pillars: enhancing member experience globally, clarifying the international brand, and**

## **optimizing internal operations.**

In this position, I would advance International ACAC's Strategic Plan with an intentional alignment to the three pillars.

### **1. Enhancing the Member Experience Globally**

Through the Regional Representative role, I aim to support a highly connected and inclusive network by launching regular, time-zone-appropriate virtual chats and meetings that highlight diverse voices and practices. I also want to ensure that members know how to access and benefit from International ACAC programmes, including mentoring, grants and conference opportunities, so participation can feel equitable and impactful. As exemplified in my work organising GUCC's inclusive programming and university visits, I will create opportunities that allow for both sharing in regional expertise and sharing out our perspectives globally.

### **2. Clarifying the International Brand**

Having worked on both 'sides of the desk', I bring a perspective that naturally connects different educational systems and cultural contexts. I will use this to strengthen the identity as a truly global organisation that reflects the diversity of its membership. I will continue to focus on ethics-focused programming and advocacy and will work towards inclusivity, cultural awareness and regional relevance.

### **3. Optimising Internal Operations**

I will streamline communication between members, the Regional Council and the Board by introducing clear feedback loops, consistent progress updates and accessible shared resources. My organisational strengths, evidenced through managing complex conference logistics, disbursing over \$40,000 USD in grants, and sustaining engagement through platforms such as WhatsApp, WeChat, and Discord, will ensure the processes are timely, transparent, and responsive. Using member data and feedback, I will also help identify representation gaps and develop outreach so the regional network supports those who could utilise the resources provided.

Through these priorities, I aim to leave Region 1 more connected, visible, and integrated into the global mission of ensuring members are informed and engaged, while also advancing access to higher education worldwide.