



## 2025 Executive Board Election Candidate

### Vice President for Finance

**Name:** Shilpa Gupta

**Title:** University Advisor

**Institution:** United World College Southeast Asia, Dover

**Location/Region:** Singapore/Southeast Asia & Oceania

**Member Group:** Secondary

### 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.**

As a current Board member representing Southeast Asia, I have felt my voice genuinely valued and appreciated. Serving as VP of Finance for the past three years has given me deep insight into the financial health of International ACAC. During this time, we faced significant challenges—investment losses, lower conference revenue, and an overall negative income. However, through strategic budgeting, careful programming, and collaboration with fellow Board members, we have successfully steered the organization back toward financial stability, nearing pre-pandemic levels. This progress has allowed us to expand member support grants and programming, reinforcing our commitment to accessibility and sustainability.

Seeking another term as VP of Finance is driven by my dedication to furthering this momentum. I see an opportunity to build on the groundwork we have laid, implementing changes that foster a more self-sustaining financial model. My goal is to ensure long-term stability while maximizing the impact of our revenue—putting resources back into the organization to enhance its programs, support its members, and strengthen its global mission.

Coming from the Southeast Asia region, I bring diverse cultural and educational perspectives, along with a deep understanding of our dynamic, multifaceted community. Working with students from 85 nationalities and colleagues from 25 countries has strengthened my ability to lead with inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. Through ongoing DEI training provided by both

International ACAC and the UWC network, I am committed to amplifying diverse voices and ensuring broader representation within the Board.

Beyond my Board role, I have actively built strong connections with schools across South and East Asia, local communities, and International ACAC members. I have contributed by presenting at conferences, volunteering for Board duties, organizing university fairs, and conducting webinars for both International ACAC and IC3 institutes. As a volunteer-driven organization dedicated to facilitating global engagement and upholding ethical professional standards, International ACAC thrives when we balance fiscal responsibility with mission-driven investment. If re-elected, I will continue working to optimize our budget, ensuring both financial strength and the continued success of our programs in service to our global community.

**Detail experiences that have equipped you with skills and insights applicable to the position you're applying for, including your leadership philosophy and strategies for effectively managing and leading a volunteer committee, emphasizing communication, collaboration, and recognition, and transferable accomplishments.**

With over 20 years in education as a Math educator, college advisor, Deputy Head of School, and Executive Board (EB) member of International ACAC, I have developed a strong foundation in leadership, communication, and strategic planning. My experiences have equipped me with the skills and insights necessary to lead and manage a volunteer committee effectively, emphasizing collaboration, recognition, and communication.

At the high school level, I have successfully established college counseling offices at two institutions and implemented strategic plans and policies. I have worked closely with institutional boards and parents, chaired steering committees, and managed budgets. These experiences have strengthened my ability to lead teams, foster collaboration, and navigate complex stakeholder relationships.

As an International ACAC EB member, I chaired the Conference Bursaries Working Committee for two years, overseeing evaluation processes, survey forms, budgeting, and ensuring diverse representation. As Vice President of Finance, I led a team of 5-8 committee members in developing revenue strategies through sponsorships and exhibits while increasing member support through grants, scholarships, and bursaries. Collaboration with the presidential team, vice presidents, and board representatives was essential in ensuring financial sustainability across committees.

I thrive in collaborative environments, and my work with the UWC movement has given me the privilege of engaging with an incredible network of counselors, fostering both professional and personal growth. I actively present at global conferences, both in person and virtually, to build professional ties and engage in meaningful dialogue with like-minded colleagues. Serving as VP of Finance for International ACAC has further strengthened my ability to work across diverse teams and industries.

My leadership philosophy centers on building strong, motivated teams where ideas are shared, and contributions are valued. I set clear objectives to maintain focus and encourage time management while fostering a culture of inclusivity and support. My management style is

positive and interpersonal, yet I apply firmness when necessary. I believe in maintaining high morale through positivity and trust, even in challenging situations. A sense of humor is also key to fostering strong relationships and ensuring a collaborative, energized team environment.

**Outline your comprehension of the role you are applying for, specifying priority areas, overall vision and challenges that you would like to address, and innovative solutions you would like to implement, while acknowledging current practices or programs you feel are effective.**

As the current Vice President of Finance, my role has been instrumental in ensuring the financial stability and sustainability of our organization. This position requires a combination of strategic financial planning, budgeting, fundraising, and oversight of revenue streams while maintaining transparency and accountability to the Executive Board, Headquarters, and broader membership.

Key Responsibilities and Contributions:

1. Strategic Budget Planning & Financial Oversight
  - I actively participate in financial planning discussions with the Headquarters, Presidential Team, and every Executive Board member to ensure a well-balanced and sustainable budget.
  - Frequent meetings with our accountant and investment lead have helped me gain a deeper understanding of our financial structure, enabling me to plan for both short-term needs and long-term sustainability.
2. Chair of the Finance Committee
  - Leading the Finance Committee, I oversee key financial decisions, ensuring that revenue generation aligns with the organization's mission and goals.
  - One of my primary responsibilities is to manage financial strategies for our annual conference, which includes working on sponsorships, exhibitors, and advertising—the second largest source of revenue after conference fees.
3. Revenue Generation & Fundraising Initiatives
  - I have led and attended multiple meetings with the Presidential Team, Headquarters, potential sponsors, and Finance Committee members to discuss and implement funding strategies.
  - Through these engagements, I have helped streamline sponsorship outreach and enhance revenue from partnerships.

Vision for the Next Term: Addressing Challenges & Implementing Solutions

1. Diversifying Revenue Streams Beyond Conferences
  - Developing a certification program for new counselors, allowing members to access specialized training while generating additional income.
2. Strengthening Sponsorship Models
  - Implementing a "Pay What You Can" sponsorship tier to attract a broader range of partners without over-commercializing the conference.
3. Enhancing Financial Transparency & Sustainability
  - Exploring investment opportunities or cost-saving strategies to further solidify our financial position.

As VP of Finance, I am committed to strengthening the organization's financial health, fostering inclusivity, and creating new opportunities for members from underrepresented regions.

**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.**

One of the most pressing challenges in college admissions for international students is financial viability. While many U.S. institutions offer generous financial aid, the resources available are often difficult to access or navigate. The gap between available funding and students' ability to secure it disproportionately affects those from underprivileged backgrounds, limiting opportunities for talented individuals who lack the guidance to apply for financial assistance effectively.

Through my experience working with the UWC movement and volunteering at Second Chance for the past four years, I have witnessed firsthand how students struggle to identify and access financial aid opportunities. As a volunteer at Second Chance, we worked with students whose financial aid offers were revoked from a U.S. institution after April 1, leaving them without options. Recognizing the urgency of their situation, a team came together and was able to secure 100% financial aid for 60 students from Nepal to universities in the U.S., Hong Kong, Canada, Europe, and more—all within just a few months after the April 1 deadline. This experience clearly demonstrates that financial aid exists, but the lack of accessibility and timely guidance prevents students from benefiting from it.

Addressing this issue is critical to making international education more equitable. One potential solution is improving transparency in financial aid information, ensuring that students, especially those from underrepresented communities, are aware of all funding options early in the application process. Additionally, expanding mentorship programs or advisory networks could help bridge this gap. In my own mentorship conversations, funding is often the central topic. My scholar mentee and I frequently discuss financial aid options for international students, reinforcing how critical and complex this issue is for those seeking higher education abroad. Having direct guidance can make a significant difference in a student's ability to secure financial aid.

I am committed to advocating for greater financial accessibility in international admissions. Whether through mentorship, policy discussions, or institutional collaborations, I believe that demystifying financial aid will allow more students to pursue higher education without financial barriers. By ensuring that financial support is not just available but also accessible, we can create a more inclusive and fair admissions process.

**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.**

As VP of Finance, I would leverage my position to align with International ACAC's strategic plan by ensuring financial sustainability while fostering diversity, inclusion, and global engagement. My goal is to create financial strategies that enhance member experience globally, clarify the international brand, and optimize internal operations.

#### Enhancing Member Experience Globally

To support a diverse and successful organization, we must prioritize inclusive financial policies that encourage participation from underrepresented regions. A more diverse, collaborative, and supportive environment will lead to stronger engagement and innovation. As a female leader from a national high school in India—a country with the second-largest international student population—and now a UWC member, I bring a unique perspective that will strengthen the organization's global reach. Key initiatives include:  
Identifying and engaging underrepresented regions by offering targeted scholarships and mentorship programs.

- Financially supporting conference participation for members from diverse backgrounds, ensuring equitable access to professional development opportunities.
- Encouraging future leadership development by providing financial assistance for young and emerging professionals.
- Ensuring that all members feel safe and empowered to contribute by asking: "Have we created conditions where every person can contribute in their unique, meaningful way and feel safe and secure doing that?" If not, we must have the courage to acknowledge gaps and work toward change.

#### Clarifying the International Brand

Diversifying revenue streams beyond conference fees by creating a certification program for new counselors, leveraging our members' expertise while strengthening our position as a professional development hub.

Recognizing and celebrating global diversity through financial support for multicultural initiatives, webinars, and networking spaces dedicated to cultural exchange.

#### Optimizing Internal Operations

To optimize internal processes, I will work closely with the Headquarters, Presidential team and VPs to ensure long-term financial stability. Increase financial transparency through improved budget tracking and reporting, ensuring that all financial decisions align with the organization's mission and strategic goals.