

Ian Bickford

Dr. Ian Bickford has been president of the American University of Afghanistan since 2021. He led the university through a period of dramatic change – including restoration of academic programs online after the fall of Afghanistan’s elected government to Taliban rule, establishment of AUAF’s branch campus in Doha, and creation of meaningful pathways to bridge secondary and higher education for Afghan girls. Before this, Dr. Bickford was the first provost of Fulbright University Vietnam, where he guided Vietnam’s first American-style undergraduate institution in developing an innovative, standard-setting curriculum while responding to the emerging realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and anticipating the needs, uncertainties, and opportunities of a post-pandemic world.

These include the increased role of digital technology in all areas of life and work, not least in higher education. Dr. Bickford brought to AUAF his experience as the chief architect of Fulbright’s digital strategy and his service training faculty in best practices for online teaching across the Open Society University Network. He also brought a commitment to international education and to combining the proven values and methods of the liberal arts and sciences with the budding opportunities of new technology to create global learning communities. This commitment is reflected in his many years of support for Bard College’s partner programs in Myanmar, most notably as part of the founding team of Parami University.

In the United States, Dr. Bickford is known as an influential leader in the growing early college movement, which creates meaningful, equitable bridges between high school and college for younger students. He was provost and vice president of Bard College at Simon’s Rock – the first early college and model for the movement – during years of significant growth for the college but also significant need to reimagine how our educational institutions serve the next generation. Toward this need, Dr. Bickford founded Bard Academy at Simon’s Rock, the nation’s first two-year high school designed to prepare students for early college studies; he taught for many years within Bard’s national early college network; and he served as the network’s academic dean. He is an associate of the Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking and senior fellow at the Bard College Center for Civic Engagement.

Dr. Bickford is a specialist in Early Modern British and transatlantic literature, with a focus on John Milton’s influence in the Americas. He also researches and writes about education and educational policy. He holds a B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley; M.A. from Stanford University; and Ph.D. from the City University of New York Graduate Center.