

# An International Education Policy

## For U.S. Leadership, Competitiveness, and Security

*More than 90 percent of Americans believe it is important to prepare future generations for a global society, according to a national poll commissioned by NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The American people are ahead of their leaders. It is time for a comprehensive national policy on international education to meet this recognized need.*

# NAFSA

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### WHY AMERICA NEEDS AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

In the decades following World War II, visionary leaders understood that international education was an important pillar of America's campaign to wage the Cold War and to secure the peace. They promoted area and foreign-language studies programs and encouraged study abroad to create expertise about a world perceived to be threatening. They also sought to ensure that those who would build the world of the future had opportunities for a U.S. education and for exposure to American values.

With the end of the Cold War, America turned inward and some thought international education was no longer important. From today's perspective, we can see that it is even more important, for two reasons. First, globalization has reached a point where the United States cannot expect to retain its competitive edge if its workforce lacks strong international and cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Second, as September 11 tragically but forcefully reminded us, it is still as important as it was during the Cold War to understand a dangerous world, to speak the world's languages, and to promote better understanding of the United States by the world's citizens.

Today, more than ever, the United States requires an international education policy to achieve these vital objectives. NAFSA and the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange, in 1999, were the first to call for an international education policy. Since then others have added their voices. There has been progress. In 2000, President Clinton signed the first-ever Executive Memorandum on international education. In 2001, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution calling for an international education policy. Funding for exchanges has increased, there is a new appreciation for the value of international students, significant progress has been made on visa reform, and the President has proposed welcome new foreign-language and competitive-

ness initiatives. But the United States still does not have a comprehensive policy for marshalling the vital resource of international education for national purposes.

The need is critical. Globalization is obliterating the distinction between foreign and domestic concerns. Today, most domestic problems are also international problems. The global economic and technology revolutions are redefining the nation's economic security and are reshaping business, work, and life. In a devastating report, the Committee for Economic Development documents the myriad ways in which the U.S. educational system fails to produce graduates with the knowledge and skills required for a global workforce. U.S. competitiveness is a national interest. It underpins national security and leadership, and deliberate policies are required to facilitate it.

U.S. dependence on international scientific and technological talent is making educational exchange relationships more complex. The United States now not only has an interest in educating international students in the United States and returning them to contribute to the leadership and development of their home countries, but we also have an interest in educating international students in the United States and hiring them to fill positions in our high-technology industries

and research establishments. Return to their home country now often occurs later, after some years of work in the United States. These new realities are rendering obsolete many of the assumptions that have guided the administration of educational exchange. Without a policy, the implementation of exchange risks becoming more and more detached from today's realities.

At the same time, international education is more important than ever for U.S. international leadership and security. Alliances matter. International relationships matter. European leaders worry about the implications for the Atlantic Alliance as the United States loses its decades-old status as the preferred destination for Europeans to study abroad. Leaders of friendly countries in the Middle East worry about a "lost generation" of future Arab leaders who will not be educated in the United States because of post-September 11 visa issues. We should worry too. These leaders understand that exchange relationships sustain political relationships; if one atrophies, sooner or later the other will too. Having fewer future world leaders study in the United States will inevitably translate into a loss of U.S. international influence down the road.

U.S. failure to produce enough Americans with advanced foreign-language capabilities to fill the needs of its defense, foreign relations, and law enforcement agencies is well known and, fortunately, is beginning to be addressed. Less appreciated is the impact of the international ignorance of average Americans—our failure to graduate people from college with even minimal knowledge of foreign regions and the ability to communicate in a foreign language. This ignorance not only impairs our capacity to lead in the future, it fuels anti-Americanism by making us appear arrogant and uninterested in other cultures.

It is time for the federal government to provide the leadership that the public demands by articulating a comprehensive international education policy that will set a strong direction for the nation, one that will guide government officials, the higher education and K-12 communities, the states, and the private sector in harnessing international education to serve vital national needs in a global age.

*An international education policy should:*

- 🌐 Promote international, foreign-language, and area studies.
- 🌐 Create a comprehensive strategy to restore America's status as a magnet for international students and scholars.
- 🌐 Create a comprehensive strategy to establish study abroad as an integral component of undergraduate education.
- 🌐 Strengthen citizen- and community-based exchange programs.

## ELEMENTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

An international education policy that effectively promotes U.S. interests in the twenty-first century should do the following:

### **Promote international, foreign-language, and area studies**

In the global age, our nation's need for international competence has never been greater. The paucity of international content in U.S. education must be addressed. On the one hand, curricula must be internationalized at all levels so that everyone who graduates from college in the United States has been educated internationally. On the other, specialized study must be bolstered to produce the high-level, advanced international and foreign-language expertise that is required today in government, business, education, the media, and other fields.

Responsibility in this area is broadly dispersed throughout American society. Colleges and universities (and local school boards at the K-12 level) bear the primary responsibility. Curricular decisions are—and should be—theirs alone. Other key responsible parties are state and local governments, where authority over education traditionally resides in our society, and the private sector, which will be the primary consumer of the internationalized talent that our education system produces. All must do their part. But the leadership of the federal government is crucial.

*An international education policy should:*

- 🌐 Set an objective that international education become an integral component of U.S. undergraduate education so that, ten years from now, every student will graduate from college with proficiency in a foreign language and a basic understanding of at least one world area.
- 🌐 Promote cultural and foreign-language study in primary and secondary schools so that entering college students will have increased proficiency in these areas.
- 🌐 Through graduate and professional training and research, enhance the nation's capacity to produce the international, regional, international business, and foreign-language expertise necessary for U.S. global leadership and security.
- 🌐 Encourage international institutional partnerships that will facilitate internationalized curricula, collaborative research, and faculty and student mobility.

## Create a comprehensive strategy to restore America's status as a magnet for international students and scholars.

The millions of international students who have studied in the United States over the years constitute a remarkable reservoir of goodwill for our country and are perhaps our most underrated foreign policy asset. Virtually every U.S. secretary of state in the post-Cold War era is on record to this effect. To educate international students is to have an opportunity to shape the future leaders who will guide the political and economic development of their countries. Such students gain an in-depth exposure to American values and to our successful multicultural democracy, and they take those values back home. International students and their dependents contribute significantly to national, state, and local economies and to the financial health of their schools; this contribution totaled an estimated \$13.5 billion in the academic year 2005-06.

International scholars constitute an equally important resource. We must not let ourselves lose sight of the fact that, as the National Academies has said, "U.S. openness to people and ideas from around the world is a longstanding strength of the American environment for innovation." Science is international, and scientific talent is today a global resource. Research at the frontiers of science is typically conducted by multinational teams. Although it is indeed important to encourage more Americans to study and work in these fields, any competitiveness strategy must include measures to attract and retain foreign talent in science and engineering for our universities—for one thing because, in many cases, it is foreign scientists who teach the courses that we want American students to take. Collaborative research by U.S. and foreign scholars is especially important for addressing today's global problems, such as disease, natural disaster, and weapons proliferation.

These resources are now at risk. There are fewer international students enrolled in U.S. universities today than were enrolled five years ago—an unprecedented situation. The transformation of the international student market over the past five years has given students many more options for pursuing their higher education, both outside of their home countries and, for many, at home as well. Foreign scientists continue to experience obstacles to teaching and conducting research in the United States, and there is concern that important scientific conferences will migrate abroad.

*An international education policy should:*

- 🌐 Outline a comprehensive strategy for making the United States more attractive and accessible to international students and scholars, and for increasing two-way scholarly exchanges.

- 🌐 Facilitate entry into the United States for bona fide short-term and degree students, and treat those who observe the terms of their visas as valued visitors while they are here.
- 🌐 Liberalize training and employment policies and regulations to enable international students to maximize their exposure to American society and culture through internships and employment, to work to help pay off their student debts, and to provide needed skills in the U.S. economy.
- 🌐 Remove unnecessary barriers to international scholars that are currently in place in the form of visa procedures (especially those governing short-term entry to attend scholarly exchanges and conferences), restrictions on basic research, inability of their spouses to work, and unreasonable delays in obtaining green cards.

## Create a comprehensive strategy to establish study abroad as an integral component of undergraduate education.

In the academic year 2004-05 (the latest year for which the percentages cited below are available), 205,983 students from all types of U.S. higher education institutions studied abroad for credit. This represented approximately 1 percent of total enrollment in these institutions, about 9 percent of all two- and four-year degrees conferred that year, and 13 percent of all four-year degrees conferred. Of those who do study abroad, the vast majority does so for a semester or less, nearly half study for only a few weeks, and nearly half study in only four countries: the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and France. Study-abroad participation does not mirror the college population. It is overwhelmingly white and female, concentrated in certain majors, and very difficult to access for students of limited financial means and nontraditional students. This degree of international exposure for U.S. college graduates can only be characterized as minuscule and, in this global age, that is simply unacceptable.

The good news is that the numbers have been growing at a fairly robust rate—nearly 10 percent annually over the past decade. Diversification of the study-abroad experience, however, in terms of both participation and destinations, is proceeding much more slowly, and the trend toward shorter term study abroad is increasing. Clearly, natural trends alone will not produce the international literacy among college graduates that the national interest requires.

The December 2005 report of the congressionally mandated Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program gives the nation a once-in-a-generation opportunity to seize the moment and create a government-higher education partnership to internationalize U.S. higher education and ensure significantly greater and more

diverse participation in study abroad by U.S. college students. Building on the commission's recommendations, Congress should move quickly to enact and fund a program that would:

- 🌐 Ensure that at least 50 percent of American students receiving college degrees will have studied abroad for credit.
- 🌐 Promote ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender diversity in study abroad, and make study abroad accessible to nontraditional students to ensure that study abroad participation mirrors the student population.
- 🌐 Promote the diversification of the study-abroad experience, including: increased study in locations outside Western Europe, especially in the developing countries; increased study of major world languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, and Portuguese, that are less commonly learned by Americans; and increased study abroad in underrepresented subjects such as mathematical and physical sciences and business.
- 🌐 Promote the integration of study abroad into the higher education curriculum, and increase opportunities for international internships and service learning.

Legislation pending in Congress, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, would achieve these objectives and strengthen our nation's ability to address today's international challenges.

### **Strengthen citizen- and community-based exchange programs**

The United States benefits from a great wealth of exchange programs, some federally funded but many more privately funded. They operate at all levels, from high school to higher education to the business and professional realms. Individual American volunteers, families, schools, and businesses make these programs possible, hosting visitors in their homes, classrooms, and workplaces, and serving as resources and guides to their communities. Exchange programs uniquely engage our citizenry in the pursuit of our country's global interests and offer opportunities for substantive interaction in the broadest possible range of fields.

This sort of citizen diplomacy is a critical resource for U.S. global engagement. While significant numbers of our citizens are involved in these activities, the capacity of the American public to host such exchanges is much greater. Clear policy statements and renewed resources underscoring the importance of citizen diplomacy—the person-to-person contact in homes, schools, and businesses in communities across the United States—will further invigorate these activities by attracting the participation of many more Americans.

These valuable programs also have been hampered by a federal regulatory regime that has lacked consistency and predictability.

*An international education policy should:*

- 🌐 Invigorate citizen diplomacy with federal leadership that includes public statements, renewed resources, and participation incentives that attest to the value of citizen involvement in international activities in communities across the United States.
- 🌐 Review and revise federal regulations of exchange programs to ensure high program quality and to encourage the growth of unofficial exchanges in all categories.

## **A CALL TO ACTION**

To be an educated citizen today is to be able to see the world through others' eyes and to understand the international dimensions of the problems we confront as a nation—skills that are enhanced by international experience. The programs that we put in place today to make international experience integral to higher education will determine if our society will have the globally literate citizenry and the international talent that will be necessary to respond to the demands of a globalized world.

*We call on the President to:*

- 🌐 Announce an international education policy in a major address, decision memorandum, or message to Congress, and propose adequate funding.
- 🌐 Assign specific roles to appropriate federal agencies and give them targets and deadlines to meet.
- 🌐 Appoint a senior White House official to be in charge of the policy and responsible for coordinating interagency efforts.
- 🌐 Create White House Council on International Education, chaired by that official, to ensure that policies and recommendations affecting international education are consistent and coherent
- 🌐 Create an advisory committee consisting of business leaders, state-level officials, higher education officials, and international education professionals to offer advice and guidance on the policy and its implementation.