



A Changed World:

NASULGC's Commission on International Affairs and the Post-Cold-War Era

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Ever since at least the end of the second world war, America's state universities and land-grant colleges have been major participants in international economic, social, and political developments. Whether in collaboration with U.S. government programs and agencies or in concert with international agencies and individual countries, America's colleges and universities have demonstrated a wide range of abilities and accomplishments in international affairs. Through the education and training of foreign nationals in U.S. institutions, the participation in building strong educational institutions overseas, the design and delivery of technical assistance and economic development projects in developing countries, and the participation in multinational projects, American university and college faculty, staff, and students have been, and will continue to be, a major resource for international development.

During the post-World War II era and the subsequent Cold War period, much of official American overseas activity focused on enhancing the economic, social, and political effectiveness of third world countries. These regions were believed to be at risk in the superpower competition characteristic of this period. Organizing their world view by geographically defined power blocks (Africa, Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Southeast Asia, for examples), American university overseas work demonstrated both great capacity in many areas and less effective results in others.

The International Achievements of American Universities and Colleges

American universities proved outstandingly effective at almost all higher education tasks.

American college and university faculty trained students and faculty scholars from around the world. This was accomplished through two models: first, our universities helped modernize and improve overseas higher education institutions while enhancing research capabilities; second, our faculties engaged in a wide range of joint research with colleagues in developing countries. Whether carried out as technical assistance, foreign student programs, university-to-university collaborative research, or host country contracts, these programs clearly established American university and college effectiveness in the domain of higher education. Such a result is no surprise. American higher education remains the best and most diverse system of higher education in the world.

University and college faculty also demonstrated remarkable success in delivering technical assistance to specific projects, principally but not exclusively in agriculture. Whether involving improved productivity and agricultural technology, better marketing, or enhanced research, agriculturally focused assistance to many developing countries produced outstanding successes. American colleges of agriculture, in particular, compiled a remarkable record of technical achievement in this post-Cold-War era.

American colleges and universities also developed a tremendous academic expertise focused on the languages, cultures, histories, economies, and societies of the developing world. Although funded by various agencies with different objectives, these decades of national investment in what has come to be known as language and area studies has resulted in a deep and rich national expertise on international topics that is unrivaled anywhere in the world. This achievement,



institutionalized in American college and university faculty, staff, students, libraries and in research materials of their institutions, may well represent one of the most enduring results of the national investment in international activity since the end of the second world war.

Cold War Program and University International Involvement

On a technical level, American university involvement proved remarkably successful and, on a project by project basis, a host of success stories exists. The aggregate of American overseas development activities, however, including the part carried out by universities, produced conflicting results. American technical assistance, including that involving universities, made food production more effective, enhanced developing countries' abilities to respond to market issues, improved sanitation and health in many regions, and strengthened a variety of important social, economic, and political institutions. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of the Cold War and the inauguration of a different international era, the world we confront today is far from the ideal model of a community of prosperous, peaceful, self-sufficient nations.

This disappointment comes partly from exaggerated and unrealistic expectations. Much of the development assistance provided by American universities and funded by the U.S. government, international agencies, and other sources proceeded in accord with theoretical models that presupposed a much smaller investment and a much larger result than turned out to be practical. It took much more investment to enhance the economies and societies of developing countries than the theorists had anticipated, and the results often seemed inadequate. Rather than reexamine the theoretical understanding of how civil societies develop and prosper, many critics found it easier to blame the providers of development assistance, the recalcitrance of recipients, or the political behavior of donors.

New Perspectives on the Academic International Commitment

Today, with the convenient menace of the Cold War eliminated and the reference points of communism and anti-communism erased, we now seek pragmatic understanding of the opportunities and limits of economic development. Further, in the years since World War II, the role of the United States in the global community has dramatically changed. No longer the principal provider of development assistance, no longer the controlling actor in the global economy, and no longer the primary source of economic dynamism, the United States does not dictate either the pace or the direction of world change. Ironically, the victory of U.S. foreign policy Cold War objectives has eliminated one of the principal sources of U.S. hegemony. The failure of the Soviet economic system leaves the United States as but one of the relatively similar economic systems, rather than the core nation in the coalition opposed to the Soviet model.

Ignoring the old issues of democracy versus socialism or capitalism versus communism, some sophisticated worldwide movements with transnational agendas have captured vast political support in many nations. These new agendas redefine established paradigms, challenging the traditional definitions of developed or developing economies. The environmental and population organizations have been particularly effective at capturing the focus of global policies.

NASULGC (National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges) institutions have responded to these changes with energy, imagination, entrepreneurship, and consternation. We wonder whether our academic paradigm of language and area studies that has served us so well over the past generations can continue to orient our international academic agenda. We discuss the impact of interdisciplinary and non-area studies agenda, such as environmental quality, trade relationships, global manufacturing and marketing systems. We struggle to iden-



tify a clear concept of our institutional interest; and we attempt to project a precise orientation to our government and its agencies responsible for America's international policies in the 1990s and beyond.

Some conclusions emerge from this discussion, although scientific precision remains elusive:

- America's international agenda must become more complex, more nuanced, and more flexible than at any other time in our history. This complexity and attention to subtlety reflect the much greater diversity of international issues and actors and the much more complex policy environment.

- America's universities must contribute to the formation of the international agenda, for no other institution has the profound understanding and the strength of individual acumen required. This capacity exists because of the major investment of both private and public funds in international educational resources and people. The nation can now draw on this deep resource to develop essential new policies.

- Traditional concepts derived from the Cold War agenda can no longer serve. This is true less because those concepts divided up the world into the wrong analytical groups and more because the Cold War agenda oversimplified highly complex issues that in today's world can no longer be homogenized. Examples include the idea of Eastern Europe as an analytical category, the notion that Latin America constitutes a homogenous policy area, and the illusion that Asia, Southeast Asia, or South Asia combine economically and politically into a seamless environment. Other Cold War concepts that dichotomized political and social worlds by means of simple tests, such as democracy versus dictatorship or capitalist versus communist, are disappearing. At the same time, new frameworks are needed for understanding the role and features of good governance. We must distinguish the various levels of citizen participation in the endlessly varied forms of political organization and economic opportunity. We

must appreciate the complex tribal and cultural components of national and sub-national conflicts.

- Global concerns such as environment, poverty, health, trade, civil violence, and basic human rights must become as powerful analytical tools as the current tools of national and regional social, linguistic, historical, economic, and cultural analysis.

- Universities must be capable of advising our own government on issues of national interest in the international domain, as well as understanding global interests which may conflict with American national interests. Academics, and the governments we advise, must articulate that few global problems have solutions that serve equally the national interests of the United States, the national interests of developing countries, and the national interests of other developed or developing countries. Further, university academics and their U.S. government colleagues must recognize and come to terms with the reality of a global society: what is in the best long-term interests of the community of nations may be a temporary disaster for some nations, some peoples, and some interests.

The NASULGC International Affairs Commission's Agenda

Within this context, NASULGC's International Affairs Commission serves as a focus for the colleges and universities of our association to carry on the continuing conversation that our nation demands on these issues. Our commission seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

- Provide advice and direction for the national policy debate on international and global issues, drawing on the international expertise and technical resources of our institutions.

- Support the reorientation and collaborative efforts of our institutions to meet the educational needs of our students who will face this



more complicated world. This involves the continued internationalization of our curricula and campuses, support for new analytical paradigms to address global issues, maintenance of a venue for conversation about the interaction between global agendas and national or sub-national cultural and historical contexts, and the creation of an opportunity to redefine American university involvement in the action agendas for this country's international policy.

■ Identify specific national issues and the institutional expertise required to advance a NASULGC position and inform a national debate. As the more complex world order requires adjustment in traditionally Cold War

oriented U.S. agencies and programs (e.g., USAID, USIA, the State Department, the Fulbright Program, language and area studies policies), NASULGC's International Affairs Commission supports initiatives that give universities and colleges a major role in the new national agenda for international affairs. This may involve close collaboration with other college and university organizations.

This short agenda offers ample opportunity for debate, conversation, and action. The shape of its success will be the participation of expert faculty and staff of our colleges and universities and the strong commitment of NASULGC to this effort.

*Produced by the Office of Public Affairs
November 1993*

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