

Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education: National Needs and Policy Implications

National Human Resource Assessment: Synthesis and Discussion

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General Comments:

The six authors should be congratulated for papers utilizing relevant empirical data to support their arguments and for papers seeking to tackle problems associated with long-term national human resource needs.

In contemplating how best to synthesize the six papers, I thought that I would tease out a set of common threads. More specifically, the papers raised several key questions about national human resource assessments and provided important components to what might be considered a roadmap to the solution of global challenges to U.S. Higher Education.

The key questions raised by the six papers are the following:

1. How do we increase interest in area studies, global studies, foreign language acquisition among students, professional schools, and employers (e.g., business and government)?
2. How do we increase the participation rates of underrepresented groups in international education (e.g., ethnic/racial minorities, science and engineering students, and males)? Continued under-representation will hamper our efforts to win the widespread support from the general public, business, and government.
3. To what extent are area and international studies being shaped by market forces and national security concerns? Are market forces and national security priorities too influential?
4. Is the U.S. better prepared today than it was in the immediate aftermath of 9-11 to confront the critical lack of area and foreign language experts?
5. Is there a disconnect between the demands/needs of the consumers of international education (business, government, and higher education) and the principal suppliers /producers of international education (Title VI National Resource Centers)?

The papers presented three threads/themes that might be considered as helpful to us as we outline possible answers to the five questions. The themes are building partnerships, focusing on relevance and self-interests, and taking advantage of optimal timing.

1. **Partnerships:** In one way or another all the papers expressed the need to construct partnerships or collaborations among area studies programs, between area studies programs and the professional schools, and among higher education, business, and government. Through greater collaboration and cooperation we are more likely to achieve our goals of integrating area studies and global foci into professional school programs (see Kennedy paper) and overcome the disconnect

- between interests and needs of higher education, government and business. What became apparent to me as I read these papers is that a viable or sustainable partnership has to be perceived by all parties involved to be mutually beneficial. Each party must feel that it is better off with the partnership than by going alone.
2. **Relevance and Self-Interests:** If students, members of underrepresented groups, government, business etc... believe that international education programs reflect their interests, respond to their needs, and are relevant to their objectives, we have a stronger likelihood of boosting interest levels and participation rates in international education. The papers from Betteridge and Kedia, Daniels, and Folks pointed to the apparent disconnect between the needs of business regarding international education and the way we teach foreign language and the extent to which our academic curriculum tends to be perceived as too abstract. It was mentioned that in a recent *Wall Street Journal* report, international expertise was listed as second from the bottom among important factors by businesses. We have to do a better job of promoting the importance of international education as well as to give a serious look at ways in which we can customize our language and area studies courses to better fit the needs of the consumers of international education albeit, without weakening the academic quality of our programs. More has to be done on campuses to develop foreign language courses geared to business, engineering, urban planning and law students. The importance of relevance and self-interests emerged boldly from the papers of Chichester and Akomolafe, Welles & McGinnis, and Betteridge especially in regard to underrepresented populations. Chichester and Akomolafe emphasized in their study of the under-representation of African-Americans that international education has to do a better job of focusing on **career goals and employability** of our students. I would add further that if international education is perceived as unrelated to educational and career goals and/or a major disincentive by virtue of adding time to the degree, we will have great difficulty solving the problem of under-representation within international education. If we don't resolve this imbalance, we will also confront great difficulty in our efforts to win the support of the community, business, government and prospective donors.
 3. **Optimal Timing:** The papers shared the recognition that we have been presented with a unique opportunity in the aftermath of 9-11 to promote the importance and benefits to U.S. society of international education. We must take advantage of this moment to demonstrate that NRCs as well as the international education community within colleges and universities are best equipped to train American students in critical foreign languages, global competency, area studies expertise. We need to educate the government and the outside community that while 9-11 has forced us to think more about our lack of knowledge of the Middle East and the Arab and Islamic Worlds, we cannot afford to neglect other world regions. Today our security needs may dictate the teaching of Pashto and Arabic, tomorrow they may require Yoruba, Swahili or Korean. We can't always base our policies on responding to the latest crisis; we need to be ready for future ones.

In conclusion, it is our moment, let's seize it.

