

Educational Partnerships with Foreign Institutions for Increasing the Quality of International Education in the United States

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ABSTRACT

International academic partnerships, if developed with mutuality, transparency, and reciprocity, are essential to building and enhancing the capacity of scholars in both U.S. and foreign partner institutions to understand each other and teach more intelligently about our world. Through the exchange of knowledge from abroad, the nation's academic and advanced research leadership is created and sustained and the quality of teaching, research, and outreach is improved. All sectors of the American government and public benefit from higher quality teaching about foreign countries and their languages, politics, economies, and religions and societies. In partnerships are the most effective foundations to build deeper and higher quality undergraduate study abroad and for faculty and graduate student research abroad addition. In addition, the almost 150 Title VI centers on foreign area, international, foreign language, and international business need much more interchange with their foreign partners and experience abroad if they are to more expertly fulfill their mandate to be national resource centers for government, communities, business, NGOs, and the broad community of K-12 and post-secondary institutions.

This chapter defines academic institutional partnerships as a collaboration that can have mutual benefits, that will contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities at both institutions, that respects the sovereignty and autonomy of both institutions, and that is empowering (Samoff and Carrol). This, therefore, does not include all institutional relationships of foreign aid donors and recipients or to all formal institutional linkage agreements. The chapter provides a number of recent statements of best practices in international partnerships, particularly those based on experiences in Africa.

While Title VI of the Higher Education Act has provided extremely important government funding for the development of international education at U.S. higher education institutions, the Title VI programs do not provide the types of funding needed to build partnerships. Instead, U.S. institutions have looked largely to other federal funding programs.

This chapter surveys the funding programs for international higher education partnerships of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the State Department, and the Department of Education (US/ED), along with statistical data about the partnerships that they have funded during the past 20 years. The data is analyzed to show that, since the end of the Cold War, State Department funding has focused heavily on the Newly Independent States of Eurasia and on Eastern Europe, consistent with foreign policy goals of promoting free enterprise and Western-style democratic institutions in that region. USAID, with its development-related goals in countries where USAID operates, has provided more than half of its support to partnerships in Africa and another 20% to partnerships in Latin America. The FIPSE Programs of US/ED have focused its partnership programs on student exchanges and related curriculum development, with a geographic focus on Mexico, Brazil, and Western Europe.

The analysis also reveals the trend toward creating programs that specify many aspects of the partnerships, some even defining the particular foreign institution, purpose, and activities that are expected. These programs resemble contracts for providing services and may not conform with conditions that promote best practices in development international partnership. The reduction in funding for more broadly-defined partnership programs, especially the State Department's Fulbright Educational Partnerships Program, is also noted with concern.