

WORLD READY?

A NEW VIEW OF THE GLOBAL STUDENT MARKETPLACE

Many of New England's 270 colleges and universities are truly international institutions—magnets for foreign faculty, scholars and students. But the world is flat, as the popular book says. Nations that once sent their best and brightest to New England for college now boast their own world-class higher education systems. Is New England prepared for the challenges and opportunities offered by a shrinking world? What's the worldwide status of the New England higher education "brand"?

CONNECTION asked a selected group of educators and interested people from New England and beyond to explore these and other crucial issues in international education, globalization, immigration and the future of New England.

Why They Come

New England's Lure to the International Student

ALLAN E. GOODMAN

Recently, a minister of higher education briefed me about a major new investment his government is making in sending graduate students abroad. "We want them to be razor-sharp," he said. "And to go to your top schools, the Ivy League."

While money and qualifications were not necessarily going to be problems, I had to spend some time explaining what the Ivy League was. His definition did not include some schools that are in this group (Cornell and Dartmouth) and did include at least two that are not (MIT and Stanford). He also held some misconceptions about programs of study. He was particularly concerned that each college have a good program in petroleum engineering as well as civil engineering and law.

I often meet officials and students abroad who act like the world is flat and that America has only three top schools ... which I can understand. In most countries, there are only a handful of top state-recognized universities, and it's inconceivable that one would want to have a degree from anyplace else. So, for example, Cairo University, which was built for a maximum of 20,000 students, now has more than 150,000. The story is the same for the mega-universities

in India, China, Indonesia, Turkey and Mexico. The world is seen as flat from many places also because in every list of the world's best universities, New England institutions (including Ivy League ones) occupy most of the top spots.

7.5 percent of the nearly 600,000 international students attending U.S. colleges and universities last year went to campuses in New England.

The Institute of International Education's annual census of academic mobility, *Open Doors*, reveals that 7.5 percent of the nearly 600,000 international students attending U.S. colleges and universities last year went to campuses in New England (down somewhat from 8.3 percent in 2000). Many more than that number applied to New England campuses but were not accepted, so enrolled in another U.S. institution. Rankings help explain that. Seven of the universities ranked among the Top 20 around the world by researchers at the Shanghai Jiao Tong University were New England or Ivy League schools, and only three are outside the United States.

The lure of New England, which has just under 6 percent of America's 4,000 accredited colleges and universities, is not only that the region has so many excellent and welcoming schools—and, therefore, alumni who return home to encourage siblings and friends to come—but also that most people abroad initially are convinced that the region contains the only schools to which one should aspire to attend. Two in three New England colleges and universities are private—a large proportion as compared with other

regions in the United States. Over the years, my colleagues and I have detected an enduring preference for private institutions among those coming from abroad and a perception that equates private institutions with high quality.

Yet in New England and across the United States, state-funded public institutions, especially the large research universities, rank among the world's best in key fields of particular interest to international students. Community colleges—an American invention that is now spreading abroad—also are attracting growing numbers of international students to New England and the United States. In fact, though foreign enrollment in community colleges slowed somewhat after September 11, there was a 20 percent increase in foreign student enrollment in these institutions between 1999 and 2005.

The good news is that as the world becomes a flatter place, and as the nationwide enrollment of international students continues to rebound post-9/11, New England schools too continue to beckon.

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World Community

Middlesex CC Infuses Global Initiatives into Core Curriculum and Beyond

CAROLE A. COWAN

Twenty years ago, Middlesex Community College (MCC) in Massachusetts decided to add a global focus to its programs. Since then, the college has garnered worldwide recognition for the range of international initiatives it has integrated into its curriculum across academic disciplines.

Today, Middlesex offers unique opportunities for international study and professional development for its students, faculty and staff, as well as training programs for foreign businesses, intercultural training for local businesses and programs to help foreign countries modernize their education and economic infrastructures.



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With one campus situated in the traditional gateway immigrant city of Lowell, Mass., and another in suburban Bedford, Mass., Middlesex serves a diverse population that includes many Asian and Hispanic immigrants. It also hosts many international students on both campuses and supports community programs with an international focus.

International awareness

An international perspective is embedded into MCC's core curriculum, which requires students, regardless of major, to take six intensive-value courses, including one with a multicultural or global awareness focus.

The college also funds international student fellowships, in which selected students visit a foreign country and study its history and culture. Once accepted for a fellowship, students enroll in a specially designed, three-credit course featuring lectures, readings and papers focusing on the history and culture of the country they will visit. MCC faculty and staff accompany students overseas during these foreign fellowships.

Since 1992, Middlesex has offered two- and three-week fellowships to China, Russia, Costa Rica, Spain, Ireland and the Netherlands. Many participants report having had life-changing experiences through this intense exposure to another culture. To ensure access for all students, MCC fellowships cover the costs of air and ground travel as well as lodging and meals.

MCC's *Pluralism in Islam* Project will present a series of faculty seminars on the diversity within Islam. Participating professors will then infuse their knowledge into a variety of college courses.

To truly internationalize the curriculum, colleges must internationalize their faculties. Middlesex constantly promotes opportunities for faculty and staff to travel abroad to attend professional development seminars on internationalizing curriculum and to collaborate with other colleges to implement these programs. MCC faculty and staff have participated in educational institutes recently in Africa, Armenia, Cambodia, Ethiopia, South America and Ukraine.

Many Middlesex international programs promote global harmony. The college is now working with the Marishane Senior Secondary School in Limpopo Province, South Africa, to address the high level of violence against women in South Africa. The goal of this State Department project is to create a Community Support Center at the secondary school, train teachers and counselors and create age-appropriate curriculum to reduce violence against women.

Middlesex also recently received a U.S. Department of Education grant to train faculty to teach about pluralism within Islam. MCC's *Pluralism in Islam*

Project will present a series of faculty seminars on the diversity within Islam. Participating professors will then infuse their knowledge into a variety of college courses. *Beginning Arabic* language courses have also been added to the curriculum.

For 17 years, Middlesex has hosted the Wider Horizons program in Lowell, in collaboration with the Lowell Public Schools and the University of Massachusetts Lowell. This unique initiative brings together teachers in training from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Protestant and Catholic, to work in the Lowell Public Schools Summer Program and the UMass Lowell National Youth Sports Program.

Link to development

There is no doubt that international education and economic development are firmly linked. Since organizations regularly transcend borders, community colleges are obligated to make their students globally literate and capable of competing internationally.

Middlesex recently completed a three-year State Department-funded project in collaboration with Azov Regional Management Institute in Berdyansk, Ukraine, focusing on workforce development and distance learning. MCC staff helped the institute develop, customize and market its contract-training services to stimulate economic development in the region and also taught institute staff how to create online and hybrid courses.

MCC's Law Center organized and ran a five-year conflict-resolution and mediation training project in Cambodia with the University of Phnom Penh's National Institute of Management. At the time, it was the only U.S.-funded education program in Cambodia.

Community global awareness

Recognizing the rich contributions people from other countries and cultures make to American life, Middlesex supports many local events and organizations that promote and celebrate international awareness in the community. For example, *Cambodian Expressions*, an annual, multi-week Cambodian film and arts festival, is cosponsored by MCC, in partnership with more than 15 local education, businesses and cultural institutions. Events are held throughout Lowell.

MCC's *One World Series* brings authors, educators, public officials, artists, journalists and other notables from around the world to Middlesex to address topics of interest.

By weaving together people and projects that reach beyond traditional educational boundaries and enrich all participants, Middlesex has rapidly become a learning center for the entire community—exactly what a community college should be.

Carole A. Cowan is president of Middlesex Community College. Email: cowan@c@middlesex.mass.edu.

What the World Needs Now: Cross-National Student Loan Programs

THOMAS D. PARKER

New England institutions have long been in the forefront of recruiting foreign students. Recently, the numbers of foreign students studying in the United States has declined partly as a result of visa problems, widespread perceptions that the United States no longer welcomes foreign students and increasing anti-Americanism abroad. The primary barrier to increasing numbers of foreign students, however, has been, and still is, lack of financing.

If we could solve this problem, foreign students could help substantially in meeting the demographic shortfall of domestic high school graduates facing New England colleges in coming years. The U.S. Department of Education projects very modest growth in 18-year-olds nationally by 2009 and declines in some parts of New England.

A well-engineered cross-national student loan program could democratize and expand international student enrollment the way the early guaranteed student loan program expanded college opportunity for U.S. students.

Foreign students are not eligible for most forms of student financial assistance. The result is that a majority of international students in our colleges come from families that are able to pay full tuition. Studying at an American university has for the most part been a luxury item for non-U.S. families. The rapidly expanding middle class worldwide has largely been shut out of U.S. higher education because of financial constraints.

This could change. A well-engineered cross-national student loan program could democratize and expand international student enrollment the way the early guaranteed student loan program expanded college opportunity for U.S. students. A number of fundamental

changes abroad have made it possible to think about a loan program for foreign students coming to the United States.

Less loan-averse

In the struggle to meet demand, national higher education systems around the world are changing from small elite systems where a few (usually affluent) students who meet rigid admissions requirements receive free tuition, to systems where students are asked to share the cost of their education through paying tuition. No government can afford to maintain free tuition and greatly expand numbers of students.

With the imposition of tuition, student loans inevitably follow. Despite initial objections to tuition, students and their families value higher education so much that they are willing to accept this change and borrow to pay for something they deem so valuable. People who previously would not have considered borrowing to pay for college are now willing to do so. In addition, because growing numbers of people in many countries are transitioning from low- to middle-income status, a much larger number of people are able to repay student loans.

Admissions and financial aid officers at New England colleges tell us if they could finance foreign students, they could reverse the decline in their numbers and begin a period of real growth.

This is good news for New England *if* we can find a way to provide financial support for these new middle-income foreign students and their parents. So far, grants for these students have been quite limited and loan programs virtually non-existent.

Sophisticated infrastructure

One reason we have not been able to meet demand by foreign students for financial aid is that many countries have not had the financial infrastructure to support credit-based aid. To ensure a steady and reliable source of student loan funds, certain financial sureties must be in play. Lenders must be assured of a market for the student loans they make; those who would buy these loans must be assured that default rates will be manageable, and that the loans can be reliably collected. Almost all developed and many developing countries have domestic student loan programs. Therefore, many countries now have reliable ways of evaluating student and parent credit-worthiness, established loan servicing organizations and financial agencies capable of creating a credit market.

A cross-national student loan program is therefore more possible than ever. The demand is there too.

Admissions and financial aid officers at New England colleges tell us that if they could finance foreign students, they could reverse the current decline in their numbers and begin a period of real growth.

What kind of mechanism could make this happen? New England has a rich history of creating public/private partnerships to help students finance their educations. In 1956, a foresighted group of civic leaders created the nonprofit Massachusetts Higher Education Assistance Corp. (now American Student Assistance) which solicited philanthropic donations from private sources to guarantee loans to Massachusetts students. The New England Education Loan Marketing (Nellie Mae) Corp. was founded in 1981, becoming a leading student loan secondary market. TERI (The Education Resources Institute), founded four years later, has become the world's largest non-governmental guarantor of student loans.

A consortium of New England education and financial institutions, possibly under the leadership of NEBHE, could once again make New England a pioneer in higher education finance by devising a workable student loan system for foreign students coming to study in the region. The availability of this type of financing could fuel tremendous growth in enrollments and substantially assist our institutions of higher education as they face projected declines in the pool of U.S. students of traditional college age.

Thomas D. Parker is senior advisor to the First Marblehead Corp. He is also a senior associate at the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Higher Education Policy and former president and CEO of The Education Resources Institute (TERI). Email: tparker@firstmarblehead.com.

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Creating Global Citizens Through Study Abroad

CAROL BELLAMY AND ADAM WEINBERG

One of the greatest challenges for a student today is how to live as a responsible citizen in a globalizing world. Today's interconnected world cannot afford bystanders or passive participants. It demands confident, skilled citizens who will make responsible choices that take into consideration how we allocate resources and what impact our decisions will have on future generations.

We need citizens who make decisions marked by the following characteristics:

- **Intercultural understanding** that helps people walk across differences to find commonalities and better ways of doing things.
- **Mindfulness** that encompasses the empathy, compassion, understanding, self-awareness and tolerance that enables people to listen, engage, and learn—allowing for better partnerships.
- **Partnerships** with others who bring different experiences and perspectives from our own, thereby enriching us all.
- **Pragmatic hope** that falls between cynicism and idealism, helping people learn how to do what is pragmatically possible to make the world a better place.
- **Social entrepreneurship** that uses innovation, creativity and calculated risk-taking to create social value.

How do we help students develop these capacities? Among other strategies, higher education must increase the number of students who study outside the United States as part of their formal education.

Naana Opoku-Agyemang, an African scholar and dean of graduate studies at University of Cape Coast, leads a group of 10 to 15 American students studying in Ghana each semester through World Learning's School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad program. The students start the semester with an intense language seminar to learn Fanti. This leads into a series of classes and seminars on the African

diaspora taught by African scholars. During this period, students take a number of excursions, where they spend time immersed in cultural dialogues with Ghanaians—elders, chiefs, healers, scholars, students, families and townspeople—in settings ranging from classrooms to remote villages. Throughout their visit, they live with Ghanaian families and work on community problems. They spend the last four weeks of their semester abroad doing an independent research project, making a deep, field-based exploration of one aspect of their experience.

Years after students return from abroad, they continue to learn languages, are keenly aware of other cultures and are more confident and committed to a sensitive global point of view.

The program is designed with the hope that students will remember that a story is never complete until all sides have been told and heard, says Opoku-Agyemang. Students should leave Ghana understanding how people are shaped by their historical and current realities and how to bridge those differences in daily life.

A student who participated in the program a few years ago wrote, "At the end of the program, I finally began to view myself as a citizen of the world. I learned how to adapt to another culture without making it change for me."

Study abroad programs teach important intercultural and language skills, but the true success of a program occurs within a student, when she realizes that she can see the world from a different cultural viewpoint. This is true global citizenship. A study published in *Transitions Abroad* magazine by Mary Dwyer and Courtney Peters of the Chicago-based Institute for the International Education of Students documented strong and lasting impacts of study abroad. Years after students return, they continue to learn languages, are keenly aware of other cultures and are more confident and committed to a sensitive global point of view. There is a growing body of literature that documents these and other impacts.

And yet far too few U.S. students study abroad—about 1 percent by most estimates—and the numbers are skewed to wealthier students from elite colleges and universities. We need to do better. We can start in three places:

- **More financial assistance from universities, the federal government and study abroad providers.** The Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Commission created by Congress in 2004 to expand study abroad opportunities emphasized the need for more financial aid. We agree. At World Learning and SIT, we will do our part by increasing the amount of financial aid we make available from our resources,

lobbying Congress to provide more funding for under-represented populations and developing programs that are accessible to a broader population of students. We ask others to do the same.

Far too few U.S. students study abroad—about 1 percent by most estimates—and the numbers are skewed to wealthier students from elite colleges and universities.

- **More attention to the quality of study abroad programs.** Leaders in the field should develop standards and continually assess programmatic impact to make sure we are getting it right. There is too much at stake to fall back on “in my heart, I know it is working.” Multi-level, multi-method assessment techniques should be carefully explored.

- **A commitment to developing programs in less-traveled destinations with experiential pedagogies and language acquisition.** The programs with the most impact are constructed with keen attention to the value of active learning

techniques, the importance of language for understanding culture, and the need to get students to travel to places where they have not already been and to study themes they have not encountered.

Furthermore, study abroad need not be restricted to a student’s junior year. The impact on intellectual engagement is large. Maybe we need more study abroad in high school—or between high school and college. Or perhaps, we need to get students abroad during their sophomore year in college—which is too often a lost year in higher education.

These are among the important issues we are talking about at World Learning and SIT. We invite others to join us in this conversation to find ways of expanding study abroad to more students in more places, as a way to ensure that our campuses are places where students develop the capacities to be citizens of a globalizing world.

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Foreign Exposure

LEE W. HUEBNER

The admirable ideal of “total” immersion in a foreign culture privileges students who plan early on for foreign study, establish early language fluency and elect majors and activities that make it easier to leave campus. But other students often find that they lack the language skills to qualify for many foreign programs or are unable to reconcile time abroad with curricular requirements at home. Especially at more self-important schools, faculties further complicate the problem by insisting that “if you haven’t taken the course with us, you haven’t really taken it.”

Less affluent students, moreover, often rule out foreign study from the start—as do many athletes, performers and campus activists who fear losing a competitive edge if they take time away from the local scene.

And yet those who miss out on foreign exposure are often those who need it most. Fostering a globally sensitive public (and electorate!) requires not so much that French-lit majors spend a year in Paris but that pre-med, pre-law and pre-business students are

exposed to the sudden jolt of seeing their home culture in a new perspective, of encountering a different, wider world which stretches the mind and soul. And this can begin to happen in just a few days—whetting young appetites forevermore!

For a dozen years, I have organized an intensive media seminar through Northwestern University, which brings several dozen students to Paris during each spring break—a cheaper project these days than traveling to Florida beaches—and more likely to garner parental support. Similar programs can thrive during colleges’ inter-sessions or summer breaks. At the same time, committed institutions are finding ways to more flexibly grant credit for courses taken abroad—including courses offered in English, albeit in non-English-speaking settings.

“When we got back from our week in Paris,” one student recently wrote, “my roommates and I decided that, from here on in, we’re going global!” The challenge for American educators in the 21st century will be to make that happen for an ever-wider range of students.

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Ambassadors

Students Building Foundations for a more Peaceful World

NICHOLAS FITZHUGH

Conflict and inequality are growing overseas, and anti-American sentiment is growing with them. It is imperative that the United States reverse anti-Americanism while leading efforts to resolve the challenges facing the members of our global family. Failure will result in stronger isolationism, nationalism and extremism around the world. As in other matters, New England institutions of higher education must play a leadership role.

The seriousness of our current state of affairs could hardly be clearer. A recent survey of 350 returning study abroad students conducted by the Glimpse Foundation found that 37 percent felt discriminated against because of their identity as Americans, and 13 percent actually felt threatened because of their nationality.

The recent *Global Competence & National Needs* report published by the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program begins with the following statement: "What nations don't know can hurt them. The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward, and that important. For their own future and that of the nation, college graduates today must be internationally competent."

We are fortunate that the institution of "study abroad" is growing in popularity. It's one of the best ways to provide students with the knowledge and tools they'll need to effectively mediate conflict and rapidly and compassionately respond to global crises. Furthermore, study abroad students serve as *de facto* ambassadors for the United States while they're abroad, helping to explain our policies, politics and culture, and showing that there is often a difference between official America and Americans. More than half the respondents to the Glimpse survey said that most locals who expressed negative attitudes towards and strengthen the United States differentiated between the American people and the American government.

As study abroad student Gillian Horton of the College of William and Mary said: "I found that most anti-American sentiment diminished when I sat down and talked to people. Most individuals did not hold my nationality against me. It is also much easier to hate or hold negative stereotypes regarding a stranger; people who might purport to dislike America or Americans in general have trouble applying these prejudices face-to-face, on an individual basis."

Collegiate study abroad participation has grown by 20 percent since academic year 2000-01 to the

point where postsecondary institutions are now sending about 200,000 students abroad each year. But this is still a very small portion of the nation's 14 million college students.

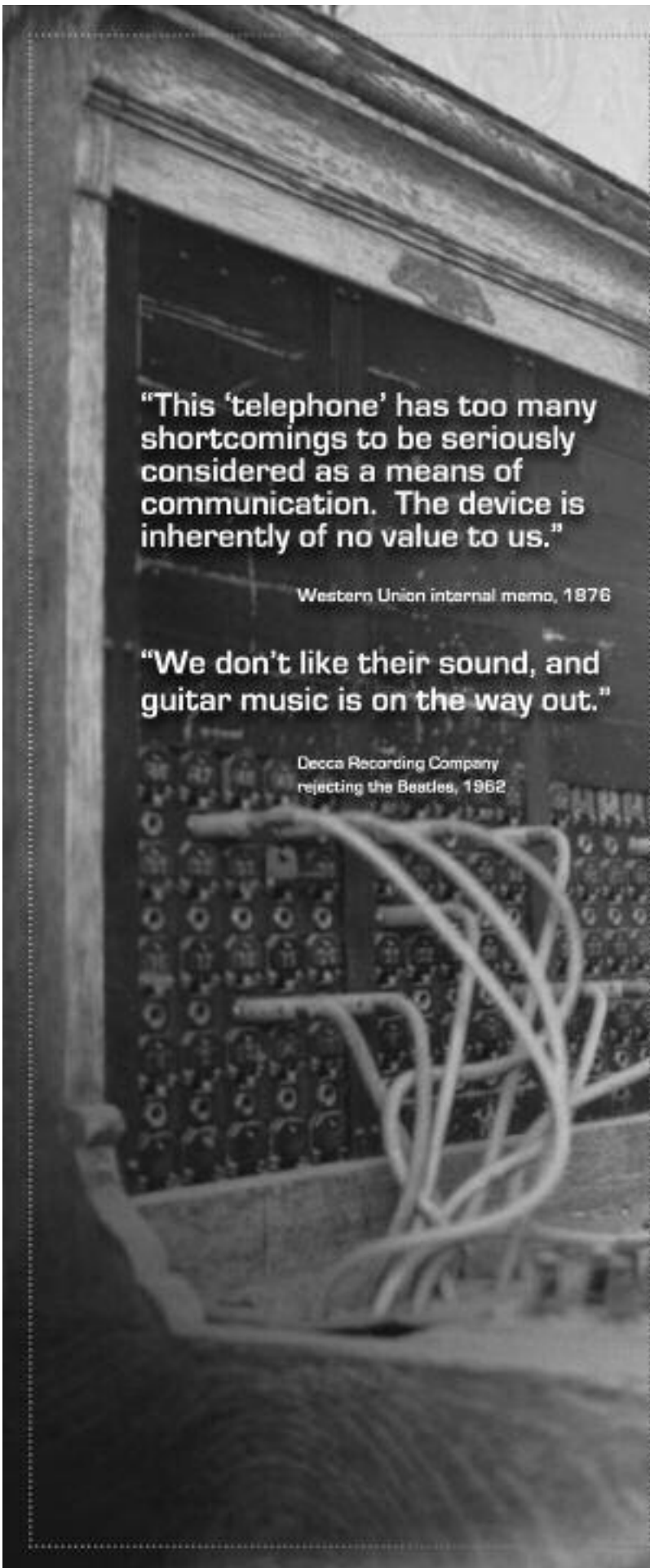
To reduce global anti-American sentiment while leading efforts to resolve the challenges facing our global family, we must devote additional institutional resources to increasing study abroad participation and enhancing its value. We must also devote more resources to leveraging the knowledge garnered by those who study abroad and their enthusiasm for it. This will serve to open the eyes and minds of those who have not shared their experiences and inspire ever-more students to study abroad.

To attain these goals, I recommend the following:

- Help push the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship proposal through Congress to support the goal of having 1 million students studying abroad by 2017.
- Initiate study abroad scholarship or fellowship programs in conjunction with or independent of the Lincoln Fellowships.
- Make study abroad a required part of colleges' curricula.
- Impose the same high standards that define on-campus courses to study abroad programming.
- Develop a strategy to incorporate international education materials into courses.
- Develop a strategy that will take advantage of what returning study abroad students have experienced and learned in order to teach and inspire prospective study abroad students.

Despite our small size, Glimpse is doing its part to help. The foundation works with 70 colleges to provide forums for sharing the experiences of young adults living and studying abroad. For the past five years, Glimpse has published a quarterly magazine, called *Glimpse Quarterly*, which features articles about personal cultural experiences written by young adults living or studying abroad. Glimpse has also managed a website (GlimpseAbroad.org) dedicated to helping young adults prepare for and get the most out of their abroad experiences.

To date, Glimpse has worked indirectly to encourage study abroad participation and enhance its value. In 2007, the foundation plans to develop a new program called Glimpse Fellowships to more directly strengthen study abroad. The program will be launched, subject to funding, in 2008. Our hope is to maximize the scope, impact and quality of Glimpse Fellowships by: a) partnering with the best program providers in the industry, b) calling on these partners to match our charitable dollars with their own, and c) defining a sub-curriculum for fellows that will allow us to take advantage of what they learn and what



"This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."

Western Union internal memo, 1876

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Decca Recording Company
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they experience for the benefit of those who are not able to study abroad.

Inspiring and developing new global perspectives that help us see one another as members of the same family should be the educational priority of the 21st century. We all must do our part to rise to this challenge.

Nicholas Fitzhugh is president and founder of The Glimpse Foundation and publisher of Glimpse Quarterly. Email: nick@glimpsefoundation.org.

Immigrant Education

Don't Forget the 1.4 Million Global Assets in New England's Backyard

MARCIA DREW HOHN

Many people in higher education are concerned about the declining numbers of foreign students attending New England colleges and universities. Restrictions on student visas since the September 11 terrorist attacks along with increasing competition from higher education institutions across the country and around the globe have both contributed to the decline. While New England higher education and economic leaders work to re-assert the region's magnetism abroad, they should refocus on the educational status of the 1.4 million foreign immigrants who already call New England home.

Foreign-born immigrants represent more than 10 percent of New England's population. According to a 2004 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, immigration is driving the region's population growth and profoundly affecting the region's economic and demographic character. The same Boston Fed report provides some important New England data gleaned from the 2000 census.

- New England immigrants differ from the foreign-born population in the United States overall. Nationally, more than half of immigrants are from Latin America, and 70 percent of that group comes from Central America or Mexico. In New England, by contrast, 34 percent of immigrants are from Europe, 30 percent from Latin America and 23 percent from Asia, with the remainder from Africa (5 percent) and Canada (7 percent). A large percentage of New England's Latin American immigrants are from the Caribbean, followed by South America and Central America.

- Most New England immigrants live in urban areas with many settling in areas of ethnic concentration. Massachusetts is home to 56 percent of the region's foreign-born residents, followed by Connecticut with 27 percent and Rhode Island with 9 percent. Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont have much smaller but rapidly growing immigrant populations.

Before New England colleges and universities—and employers—put all their efforts into recruiting talent from abroad, they should think about the immigrants already here in New England.

- Educational attainment among New England immigrants is high. Seventy percent have high school diplomas, 30 percent have college degrees, and 14 percent have advanced degrees. Recent immigrants claim even higher educational attainment, surpassing that of the native population. Highly educated immigrants are likely to be trained in high-demand fields such as computer science, mathematics, architecture, engineering and life and physical sciences. But many of these professionally trained people cannot attain the credentials they need to practice their occupations in the United States.

- Median household income among New England immigrants was \$42,900 in 2000—13 percent lower than the native population. Nearly a third of New England's immigrant households fall in the lowest income quartile of all New England households.

Vital to economy

Recent studies have extolled the importance of immigrants to both the U.S. and New England economies. Five hundred-plus economists and scholars signed a recent letter to President Bush and Congress from the Independent Institute pointing out that immigration yields skills, capital, lower costs and entrepreneurship, and hailing immigration as “the greatest anti-poverty program ever devised.”

Studies by Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies have documented how Massachusetts and other Northeast states have become dependent on foreign immigration for population growth. The Northeastern research suggests that the Massachusetts labor force would actually have shrunk during the 1990s without immigrant labor. But as the Fed's household income figures reveal, the importance of immigration to the regional economy has not translated into economic success for the immigrants themselves.

Speaking English

The first step to economic success for New England's immigrants is to obtain enough fluency in English to

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communicate easily. Foreign-born adults rarely arrive in America speaking excellent English if they speak English at all. Most immigrants are not in a financial position to pay for English language classes, so they depend upon public services, namely the network of colleges, education agencies and community organizations offering Adult Basic Education (ABE). Fully 60 percent of the highly developed Massachusetts ABE system is devoted to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Connecticut and Rhode Island also offer vigorous ESOL services, while other New England states are just beginning to respond to rising ESOL demand. Still, the demand for ESOL far exceeds the services available in all New England states. In Massachusetts, 18,000 to 20,000 residents are on waiting lists for ESOL services at any given time, and they can expect to wait up to two years before a slot opens up.

We should be asking how we can successfully transition foreign-born adults into community college.

Moreover, most public ESOL services are not designed to develop English beyond basic communication and certainly not to the level where one could effectively participate in community college programs. Since these two-year college programs have been shown to move people out of marginal incomes and offer an entrée to further higher education, we should be asking how we can successfully transition foreign-born adults into community college.

Transitional education

A further problem for adult immigrant students in community colleges is that much of their courseload is taken up with needed academic ESOL and “developmental” or remedial education. By the time they are ready to take *regular* courses, immigrant adults may have used up Pell Grants and other financial aid (and lost precious time).

Language is only one of the obstacles facing immigrants in American higher education. They are in unfamiliar territory and need special assistance with such areas as admissions, financial aid, study skills and career guidance.

Fortunately, new models for ESOL Transition are emerging that take some of these challenges into account. These programs are generally subsidized by foundations or public funds and, therefore, free of charge to participants. An upcoming report by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy identifies some important strengths shared by these ESOL transition models: One, they facilitate progress in postsecondary education through advanced ESOL courses that develop both English communications and academic language skills. Two, they align ESOL courses instructionally with credit-based introductory

The importance of immigration to the regional economy has not translated into economic success for the immigrants themselves.

courses such as English Composition or Introduction to Psychology. Three, they have clear academic benchmarks for admission, strict attendance policies and procedures to regularly monitor student learning. Four, they help immigrant students navigate admissions and financial aid bureaucracies and provide college success skills and career guidance. Five, they emphasize a “learning community” approach where students are in a supportive cohort that travels through the college experience together.

There is an obvious need for more programs exhibiting these and other features, as well as programs designed intentionally to bridge identified education gaps and better prepare college faculty to address the needs of foreign-born adult students.

In addition, policy changes are needed to help foreign-born students pursue college. In particular, granting in-state tuition rates to undocumented immigrants who have proven track records of working and paying taxes seems both fair and economically prudent.

Cast your buckets down

Before New England colleges and universities—and employers—put all their efforts into recruiting talent from abroad, they should think about the immigrants already here in New England. They should consider how those New Englanders can be assets to the campus and the workplace, bringing diversity, talent, know-how and energy. They should recognize how the presence of immigrants provides native workers with the intercultural exposure and international savvy needed to compete in the global economy. And they should consider what these new residents need educationally and occupationally to thrive.

Booker T. Washington told an instructive story about overlooking what is right in front of you. A ship got stranded outside a harbor. Those on board had run out of water and were dying of thirst. They were frantically signaling to the shore to bring water. What they did not realize was that they were in the mouth of a river, surrounded by fresh water. The people on the shore kept signaling back “Cast your buckets down, where you are.” New England’s immigrants are working hard to improve their lives and the lives of their communities. We need to cast our buckets down ... and realize what these new New Englanders could do with a little recognition and support.

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