International Exchange Programs: The Recipe for Global Citizenship…Sprinkle a Little Dignity to Taste

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At the forefront of an increase in international educational exchange programs between the United States and China, the Fulbright Program has a long and distinguished history based on the rubric and principles of academic excellence, cross-cultural exchange, and people to people diplomacy. The impetus for the formation of international exchange programs lie in the crimes against humanity and the violation of dignity witnessed as a result of the two World Wars. The Fulbright program was established in an attempt to cultivate stronger bilateral and cross-cultural relationships in addition to preventing future atrocities from reoccurring. The author, a former Fulbright Scholar at Xinjiang Arts Institute (2006) and a former Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) who taught English at Yibin Teachers’ College in Sichuan province (1999-2001), will explore the history and significance of international exchange programs for the U.S. and China, respectively, and how these programs contribute to a greater sense of awareness and acceptance of diversity. Through anecdotes the author will discuss her experiences as a Fulbright Scholar and Peace Corps Volunteer in China encountering issues such as identity politics.

Holocaust and Human Rights Violations: The Rise of International Exchange Programs

“Dignity requires reciprocity; it needs to be given and received and when both parties feel that their dignity has been honored, basic human needs are fulfilled.”

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The 20th century ushered in several periods of dark times for humanity; times of suffering and despair, where regard for the “other” or those perceived to be threatening manifested into a sense of aggression and bitterness. A time when the unknown was feared, causing feelings of distrust and contempt. There was contempt against people who looked different, spoke different languages or held different religious beliefs, not to mention a blatant fear and aggression towards individuals believed to be “weird” or “exotic”. The Holocaust is one of those dark times for humanity. In Hitler’s eyes Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, Jehovah’s witnesses, and the mentally impaired were all considered to be subaltern. He systematically persecuted and executed all those he deemed as “other”. The 20th century also exposed the terrible truth that war did not only involve soldiers, but innocent civilians as well. Crimes against humanity including genocide2, torture, slavery, and sexual and gender-based violence reared its ugly head and the violation of human dignity became a tactic of war.

1 Dr. Donna Hicks provided the paper in class as part of a reading assignment for her Conflict and Negotiation course at Clark University (Spring 2005). The paper has not yet been published.
2 Other acts of genocide include the killing of Tutsis by Rwandan Hutus in 1994, the “ethnic cleansing” in Kosovo by Serbs during the 1990s and the widespread genocide in Cambodia during the 1970s http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/war_crimes_genocide/ accessed on June 5, 2007.
This paper examines international exchange programs such as Fulbright and the Peace Corps in order to examine the significance and benefits of such exchanges that in turn build a strong foundation for globally and culturally aware citizens. Lourdes Quisumbing, President of Asian-Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education (APEID) describes global citizenship as 1) the ability to approach problems as a member of a global society, 2) the ability to understand, accept, and tolerate cultural differences, 3) the ability to be sensitive towards and to defend human rights, rights of women, ethnic minorities, etc., and 4) the willingness to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner (Quisumbing, 2002:6). Using this understanding of global citizenship, I postulate that global education and citizenship are essential to cultivating relationships with foreign counterparts and to gaining a better understanding of that culture; and that international exchange programs are successful methods in encouraging and fostering these relationships. Grantees from international exchange programs return to their countries as informed visionaries. The skills and cumulative body of knowledge they acquire help to shape grantees into global citizens.

Donna Hicks, Associate Professor at Harvard University’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, has focused her research on the processes of understanding international and interethnic conflicts and promoting dialogue within warring or opposing groups. She states that fear, the fear of others, and the violation of dignity, has been the driving force behind atrocities against humanity including such instances as the holocaust, genocide, and other human rights violations. Dr. Hicks supports the idea that ignorance and indifference of the “other” breeds feelings of ethnocentrism. Hicks explains that, “when one feels de-stabilized by a threatening event, this aids in creating fear, anger, anxiety, and an impulse toward self-preservation and what often seems to be the case of directing the anger and hostility toward the threatening other.” Thus, individuals who encounter dignity violation harbor feelings of resentment and may act irrationally, often times exhibiting hostile behavior. Dignity violation is described as not being recognized as a human being, not being acknowledged, being judged or criticized unfairly and being considered inferior due to noted cultural, racial and ethnic differences.

In fact, Dr. Hicks believes human dignity violation, imperialism and miscommunication have been some of the main reasons for conflict. She notes, “Miscommunication, and indeed war, is often the result of cultural misunderstanding, which stems in part from insufficient information and education, as well as from mass media misrepresentation”. (Hicks 2005) It is no coincidence that international exchange programs such as Institute of International Education, which foster cross-cultural relations and open narratives were formed after each world war. IIE was created after WWI and Fulbright was created after WWII in an effort to foster better bilateral ties and mend relationships through educational and cultural exchanges.

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3 Dr. Donna Hicks also chairs the Herbert C. Kelman Seminar on International Conflict at Harvard University.
4 Dr. Donna Hicks, A Matter of Dignity (unpublished paper).
5 See Donna Hicks, A Matter of Dignity (unpublished paper).
Out of Many, One People

My experiences as a Fulbrighter and Peace Corps Volunteer in China have allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. While earnestly trying to dispel incorrect assumptions about Americans I have worked to simultaneously promote an awareness of other cultures. This framework challenges me to analyze deeper aspects of my own identity, how I see myself and how others view me, as well as other Americans.

As a foreigner in China, I am often asked my country of origin. However, I have noticed that as a person of color in Xinjiang, I am also more often probed regarding my ethnicity. Once, after answering that I was American, an old Uyghur man answered, “No, you can’t be American. America doesn’t have any black people.” As an American of Jamaican descent, my family instilled in me a deep appreciation for cross-cultural differences. This understanding stems from the fact that many Caribbean people are multi-ethnic. My plural identity is often times of great interest for individuals whose ethnicity is paramount in the formation of identity politics. It is these questions that provide a forum in which to discuss American diversity and the hyphenated identities many Americans assume.

The Jamaican motto, “Out of many, one people,” has shaped my world view and has profoundly impacted my concept of identity. A former British colony and major port of trade, the island prides itself both on diversity and unity. In *The Formation of a diasporic Intellectual* Stuart Hall explains the context of the cultural and ethnic blending of Jamaica by stating, “The Caribbean is already the diaspora of Africa, Europe, China, Asia, India and this diaspora re-diasporized itself here.” This ethnic amalgamation contributes to the richness of the island but also inculcates a respect and awareness of ethnic histories.

I believe the question regarding my *millet* coming from a Uyghur is especially important. Uyghurs tend to base their identity on three main factors; religion, ethnicity, and oasis identity. As such a Uyghur would answer the question of who he is as, a Muslim, a Turk and from Hotan. Therefore this Uyghur man is not only asking about my ethnicity, but also questioning how I would categorize my race and essentially, my identity. In the *Power of Identities*, Castells analyzes the construction of identities and their effect on civil society. He states that “identity is people’s source of meaning and experience” and as social beings we are prone and somewhat expected to have several identities (Castells, 1997, p.6). The difficulty arises when we are expected to choose one identity over another; for example, American, Caribbean, female, and so forth. As an unofficial “representative” of African Americans, (not a term I self-identify with), I have tried to provide opportunities for my Chinese and Uyghur friends and colleagues to discuss American diversity and why I too, a person of color, was also simply an American.

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Peace Corps: Diplomacy through Activism

Along the same vein of promoting democracy and better cross-cultural understanding, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961. In addition to genuinely wanting to improve the livelihood of the developing countries, President Kennedy was also keenly aware that the U.S. position in the Vietnam War was a source of contempt against Americans and U.S. foreign policies. The premise of the Peace Corps program focuses on sending American volunteers to developing countries to help increase literacy rates, introduce business skills and reduce mortality rates by introducing innovative health measures. The three goals of Peace Corps include: 1) Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women 2) Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served 3) Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

With these goals in mind, Peace Corps Volunteers are deployed to various countries for a period of 27 months which include a three month in-country pre-service training (PST). Although interest to establish a Peace Corps China program began in 1988, the first group of volunteers did not arrive until 1993 to train future Chinese teachers of English. Since 1993, Peace Corps Volunteers have been placed in the Sichuan, Guizhou, and Gansu provinces as well as Chongqing Municipality. With the unfortunate outbreak of SARS the program was suspended in 2003, but reinstated in the summer of 2004. Although the fields that volunteers can serve in have expanded, English education continues to be the main focus of Peace Corps China. Based on the Peace Corps website for China, “volunteers are teaching in 60 universities, including five medical colleges and three vocational colleges, teaching English education.”

In 1999, I joined the Peace Corps to continue my understanding of Chinese culture through immersion and to also promote a better understanding of American culture through “people to people diplomacy,” a phrase then-Ambassador Lauren Moriarty used as we were sworn in as volunteers. My passion for learning and dedication to teaching led me to surrounding universities in Sichuan province, as I was often invited to discuss such topics as “American Diversity” and “The History of Music.” In addition to teaching English, I organized activities to increase opportunities for learning. One of these activities included establishing the Women in Development (WID) scholarship program.

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for female students, enabling them to continue their education in spite of financial hardship.

My Peace Corps service in China was a pivotal point in my life. It afforded me the unique opportunity of living in a developing country, which in turn fostered in me a higher level of cultural sensitivity. I also formed long-lasting friendships. Additionally, a three week trip to Xinjiang piqued my interest in the Uyghurs of Xinjiang and their cultural expressions of dance. I found the costumes, music, and dance to embody a richness that led to my fascination for their traditional arts. It is this fascination that encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright fellowship to further my understanding of Uyghurs and their unique dance form. These experiences collectively have contributed to my ability to encourage and embrace diversity. I have gained a greater sense of self, yet recognize that there are more things that connect my Uyghur and Chinese friends than divides us.

**J. William Fulbright Program Worldwide**

International Exchange programs, their objectives, as well as their methods of exchange are as varied as the individuals chosen to partake in such exchanges. The Fulbright program, a pioneer in the field of international exchanges, is named after the visionary and founder, Senator J. William Fulbright. His intention for the program stemmed from his “quest for peace and understanding” by establishing international educational exchanges between the U.S. and foreign countries. In fact, the first act for Fulbright exchanges was signed in 1946 with China.11

After World War II, Senator Fulbright realized the benefits and significance of multicultural exchanges and rallied support for such exchanges from the U.S. Congress and universities around the world. The Fulbright program sends Americans overseas and also brings non-Americans to the U.S. to promote a greater cross-cultural understanding. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs under the Department of State has sponsored approximately 279,50012 Fulbrighters worldwide since its inception 60 years ago. The primary source of funding is made through an annual appropriation by the US Congress.13 Supplemental sources of funding occur through participating countries and governments who contribute various forms of cost-sharing, which may include tuition remission and housing.14

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11 This was later suspended in 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was established. Ties between Fulbright and China were re-established in 1979.

12 The program has awarded approximately six thousand grants in 2006, at a cost of more than $235 million, to U.S. students, teachers, professionals, and scholars to study, teach, lecture, and conduct research in more than 150 countries, and to their foreign counterparts to engage in similar activities in the United States. IIE Annual Report. May 29, 2007

13 The total number of foreign grantees was 3655 (2444 students, 620 research scholars, 95 lecturing scholars, 336 teacher exchanges or seminars, 161 Humphrey fellows). The total number of U.S. grantees was 2621 (1210 students, 192 research scholars, 962 lecturing scholars, 257 teacher exchanges or seminars). IIE Annual Report. May 29, 2007

14 IIE Website: [www.iie.org](http://www.iie.org) accessed on May 23, 2007
The countries with the greatest number of students coming to the United States include India, China, Korea, and Japan per statistics available for 2004/05-2005/06. Students from Asia comprise 42 percent of students participating in international exchanges and enrolled in U.S. higher education. Most popular fields of study for international students enrolled in U.S. institutes of higher learning include Business management (17%), Engineering (15.7%) and Sciences (10.5); these areas of study tend to be fields in which international students feel they will have greater career potential.  

J. William Fulbright Program in China

“The Fulbright Program is a uniquely effective form of public diplomacy enabling participants from every cultural, ethnic, and economic background to create ties of understanding and respect between the United States and other countries.”  

After signing the act with China to promote international exchanges, the China Fulbright Program was the first Fulbright Program to be inaugurated in 1947. While the program was being structured, the People’s Republic of China was established, resulting in the termination of the China Program. The program eventually resumed thirty years later. The initial focus of the program was English teaching, but has grown to include a focus on American Studies. In Chinese Universities Look Outward, Madelyn C. Ross, China Coordinator and Director of China Initiatives at George Mason University, states that “China’s drive for modernization was the main engine powering its educational exchange programs with the U.S.: nearly all were aimed at the acquisition of western technology and scientific expertise.” The Chinese’s desire to expand their scientific and technological expertise was a result of years of a closed society. The Chinese very eagerly wanted to learn from their western counterparts in order to excel and assume their current position as a technological powerhouse.

Wanting to maintain a balanced relationship of exchange, the American Lecture Program and the Chinese Research Program, under the Fulbright Fellowship program, broadened its areas of discipline to include history, business, sociology and international relations among others. The original exchange with Chinese universities has expanded to approximately 125 universities (2006) with hopes of increasing to cities outside of Shanghai and Beijing. The Chinese Ministry of Education has a vested interest in the program and as of 2005 has funded approximately 600,000 USD towards the Chinese grants; however, over 80 percent or $4.5 million comes from the Department of State.

Per the 2006-2007 Fulbright Directory, “in 2004 the number of Chinese Fulbright grant nearly doubled following an agreement reached between the Chinese Ministry of Education and the U.S. Department of State to expand the U.S.-China Fulbright Program and share in the cost of funding individual Chinese Fulbright grants.” With the generosity of the U.S. Congress, funding has increased by 50% thereby resulting in a total of 60 Chinese grantees going to the U.S. This additional funding also resulted in over 100 U.S.

15 The information provided is for the 2004/05-2005/06 academic year and can be found on the IIE website, on the section “Open Doors 2006-Fast Facts” article. Accessed May 20, 2007
16 IIE website: www.iie.org accessed on May 25, 2007
grantees going to China to conduct research in various fields to include environment, labor movements, anthropology, business and the arts.

Priding itself in investing in people rather than governments, the Fulbright Program has a clear and firm belief that Fulbrighters will have the capacity to promote better understanding between the U.S. and host country or “people to people diplomacy”\(^{18}\). Therefore, the Fulbright Act was a bold and insightful move in trusting that people, not governments, have the capacity to promote cultural exchanges and that these relationships would be paramount in preventing the atrocities of the previous World Wars.

**Developing Educational Diplomacy: Challenges in International Exchange and Study Abroad Programs**

Globalization has resulted in international policies having greater impact on the cultural and social aspects of our lives. Genocide in Sudan, earthquakes in Hawaii, and nuclear testing in India affect us all. Globalization has in fact made us interdependent with an even greater need to communicate effectively and show empathy towards one another. International Exchange programs, such as Fulbright and the Peace Corps that encourage the “common humanity among parties”\(^{19}\) can be looked upon as benchmarks of achievement. Though these programs contribute to better cross-cultural relations, there is always room for growth and improvement. Today, most domestic problems are also international problems. International exchange education is more important than ever for U.S. international leadership and security. Alliances matter.

NAFSA, the Association of International Educators state, “Our failure to graduate people from college with even minimal knowledge of foreign regions and the ability to communicate in a foreign language is a challenge. 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.” This perceived arrogance and ignorance of other cultures is what Donna Hicks has based her research and life’s work on and has ascertained that these characteristics are the driving forces for dignity violation. She explains: “I feel confident in claiming that human beings—at this stage of our evolution—know little about how to manage conflict in a way that maintains our integrity and the integrity of our relationship with one another. We know much more about how to fight with and destroy one another—this we have perfected. Learning how to relate to one another in a way that brings out the best in us rather than the worst, we have advanced very little.”\(^{20}\)

This relates directly to Hicks’ belief that the violation of one’s dignity is a direct cause of wars. We know our enemies on a very superficial level. Their culture and values are insignificant as we plummet our way in vein in search of weapons of mass destruction.

Educators, scholars, and advocates for global citizenship (global education) feel changes should take place long before students enter college. In 2002, Lourdes Quisumbing’s paper *Citizenship Education for Better World Societies: A Holistic Approach*, was presented at the 8th UNESCO APEID International Conference on Education in Thailand. In it she outlines the concept of global citizenship stressing that it

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\(^{18}\) A phrase used by then-Ambassador Lauren Moriarty as we were sworn in as Peace Corps Volunteers. Chengdu, Sichuan, June 1999.

\(^{19}\) A phrase used by Sarah Eltantawi, the author of: *The Problem with the Dialogue of Civilization*

\(^{20}\) Donna Hicks A Matter of Dignity (unpublished paper)
should be introduced in elementary and secondary schools and the necessity of global citizenship placing an emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to greater society. She believes global citizenship is a “holistic process” that involves various aspects of an individual’s life and should permeate through their everyday interactions, including outside of the classroom. She notes the curricula would, “promote qualitative values, attitudes and behaviors of a culture of peace, including peaceful conflict-resolution, dialogue, consensus-building and active non-violence.” From this standpoint, ethical leadership, cross-cultural understanding and humanism is encouraged; traits that would prevent the violation of human dignity and promote peaceful means of resolving conflict.

In her paper Quisumbing asks, “What knowledges, sensitivities, attitudes, values and action-competencies are needed in developing global citizens?” She discusses findings from research conducted by experts in a Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIED) study which outlines eight main competencies that contribute to global citizenship; however I postulate that the following four competencies most closely dovetails with the ethos of international educational exchange programs such as Fulbright and the Peace Corps. With the support of the global community, Oxfam Great Britain (OGB) has created a curriculum entitled Oxfam Education for Global Citizenship: A Guide for Schools in which it outlines modules such as Social Justice and Equality, Diversity, Globalization and Interdependence, Peace and Conflict that are essential to the development of global citizens and I argue are skill sets that are necessary and can also be achieved vis-à-vis international exchange programs.

**Conclusion**

The significance of international exchange programs cannot be emphasized enough. These programs are the foundation in which peaceful bilateral ties are based. The result of a decline in funding Fulbright and the Peace Corps programs would mean fewer opportunities to promote diplomacy, cultural enrichment, and better cross-cultural relationships between nations. Stakeholders such as the participants, communities, universities, governments and countries reap these benefits by having bright, informed and culturally sensitive global citizens. This in turn translates into the possibility of fewer conflicts. Dr. Hicks notes in, *A Matter of Dignity: Building Personal and Political Relationships*, that dialogue is essential in thwarting future conflicts; however, the dialogue must be honest and participants must be aware of cultural sensitivities.

Sarah Eltantawi, Director of Communications for the Muslim Public Affairs Council (2001-2004) and the author of *The Problem with the Dialogue of Civilization*, supports this statement further by noting, “Dialogue is also only useful when both parties are truly committed to listening to the problems and grievances of the other. After listening, it then becomes important to exercise empathy - an emotion that can only be called upon when there is an assumption of sameness and common humanity among the parties.” I would like to emphasize that this “common humanity among the parties” has been the foundation and driving force behind international exchange programs such as Fulbright and the Peace Corps. It is our collective responsibility to see that these programs are not only sustained, but strengthened and broadened to include a greater diversity of participants, projects, and locations in our pursuit for global citizenship.
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