

Academic Exchange: *A Pillar of American Public Diplomacy*

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Key Facts

- Academic exchange is a key pillar of U.S. public diplomacy strategy.
- Academic exchange is intended to increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries.
- Many national security officials have stated the importance of academic exchange programs.
- There are a variety of academic exchange programs designed to reach different target audiences.
- The number of people reached in people-to-people engagements through academic exchange is significant.

Academic Exchange is a Pillar of Public Diplomacy

ASP states, “Public diplomacy also has to be about more than simply explaining America to the world. It has to be about building partnerships, finding commonality, sharing challenges, and demonstrating why America is a great nation.”¹ Listening to foreign audiences is a fundamental component of public diplomacy, and academic exchanges facilitate this type of interaction.



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Scholars point to academic exchange as a program that develops “mutuality,” in which both parties benefit.² These exchanges not only expose foreign publics to American ideals and cultures—they also provide American students, educators, and families with valuable experience and information that can be used to improve quality of life, competitiveness and security in the United States.

Academic exchange programs are generally viewed as long-term elements of strategically minded public diplomacy. U.S. Government-sponsored exchanges are handled by the State Department’s Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs.

This fact sheet outlines the national security benefits of academic exchange, highlights the types of government-sponsored programs, and explores the metrics surrounding these exchanges. This presentation aims to paint a clear picture of academic exchange programs and their benefits for the United States.



Fulbright East Asia/Pacific Regional conference. Japan was one of the first countries to participate in the Fulbright Program. Courtesy Fulbright Japan

Academic Exchanges Enhance National Security

Academic exchange programs have direct linkage to long-term national security strategies. Participating students often build relationships and skills that benefit national security and are necessary in a competitive global environment. These programs have enjoyed broad support from national security officials.

- Former Senator Richard Lugar was a proponent of the idea that exchange programs enhance national security, stating:
 - “It was very important in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy in the United States to get to know students in Muslim countries and for them to know us.”³
- Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates outlined the benefits academic exchange has for the U.S., stating:
 - “No policy has proven more successful in making friends for the United States than educating [international] students at our colleges and universities.”⁴
 - “Connecting students across borders is one of the most effective ways of building understanding across nations.”⁵
 - “Our economic future depends on Americans who can work successfully in an international setting...Like it or not, America is a country with global responsibilities and commitments. The desire to turn inward ... is understandable, but both unrealistic and unwise.”⁶
- Former Secretary of State Colin Powell also explained the benefits academic exchange offers for America:
 - “International students and scholars benefit from engagement with our society and academic institutions and we benefit enormously from their interaction with our society as they help our

citizens develop understanding and knowledge that enriches our lives, increases international cooperation, enhances our national security, and improves our economic competitiveness.”⁷

- Several exchange programs focus specifically on building language skills considered vital for national security.⁸ These languages often become crucial for building economic ties, conducting matters of diplomacy, or for intelligence agencies.

Types of Government Sponsored Academic Exchange Programs

There are three distinct types of programs—those that facilitate international student travel to the U.S., programs for American students to travel abroad, and “traditional” programs that incorporate both American and international travel. Below are examples of the varieties of programs.

Traditional Academic Exchange Programs

- **Fulbright Program**

- The Fulbright program was the flagship program of U.S. academic exchange,⁹ and continues to facilitate international ties today.
- The Fulbright Act was passed in 1946, using the sale of surplus war material to fund “promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture and science.”¹⁰
- The Fulbright-Hays Act was passed in 1961, consolidating all previous related laws and serves as the legislative basis for the Fulbright Program today.¹¹
- It aims to “assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic and peaceful relationships between the United States and the other countries of the world.”¹²
- The act finances academic exchanges, art and athletic tours and U.S. participation in international fairs.
- Students, scholars, artists and professionals travel overseas and to America for defined amounts of time in Fulbright exchanges.
- The Fulbright program operates in over 155 countries.¹³
- 81 Fulbright alumni have received the Pulitzer Prize.¹⁴



Over 155 countries participate in Fulbright Exchanges. Courtesy U.S. Department of State

- **Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) Abroad**¹⁵

- Americans spend an academic semester or year studying abroad in select countries with significant Muslim populations.

- Students from countries with significant Muslim populations spend an academic year in the U.S.
- Students live with host families.
- Participants attend local schools.
- **Chris Stevens Youth Network**¹⁶
 - Aimed at 15-18 year olds.
 - Includes virtual and real world exchanges, with focus on both students and educators.
 - Not open to individual exchanges, but rather groups of candidates from schools, classes, or youth clubs/organizations.
 - Focuses on: conflict resolution and peace education, the environment, civic education, social entrepreneurship, empowering girls and young women, food security, health, and literacy and education.

Academic Exchange Programs Specifically Intended for U.S. Citizen Participation

While some programs for U.S. citizens exist, academic exchanges tend to greatly favor international students. U.S. programs have great potential to expand and work to expose Americans to the rest of the world. As Condoleezza Rice pointed out, America should do more to understand other cultures and learn foreign languages, stating, “Our interaction with the rest of the world must be a conversation, not a monologue.”¹⁷

- **Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX)**¹⁸
 - American students experience a fully-funded academic year in Germany.
- **National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y)**¹⁹
 - Merit based scholarships are awarded to US. high school students and recent graduates for learning less-commonly studied foreign languages overseas.
- **Critical Language Scholarship Program**²⁰
 - Offers scholarships for college students to attend intensive summer institutes in 13 “critical” foreign languages, including Arabic, Azerbaijani, Bangla, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.
 - Students receive instruction for a minimum 20 hours per week in a 7-10 week program at an institution in a foreign country.
- **National Security Education Program**²¹
 - David L. Boren Scholarships: Students study in a country considered critical to U.S. national security to study its language and culture for up to one year. Recipients must work for the U.S. government for at least one year.

Academic Exchanges Specifically Intended for Non-U.S Citizens

- **Education USA²²**

- Operates in 170 countries.
- Not an actual exchange program, but is rather a network of advising centers designed to help students find information on how to apply to U.S. colleges and universities.
- Located in embassies or consulates, or in partner institutions.



Students from the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program.
Courtesy U.S. Department of State

- **FLEX (Future Leaders Exchange)²³**

- 15-17 year olds are eligible.
- Students spend a year in America.
- Students come from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine.

- **American Serbia and Montenegro Youth Leadership Exchange²⁴**

- For an academic year, students live with host families and attend local high schools.
- 15-17 year olds are eligible.

- **Benjamin Franklin Summer Institutes²⁵**

- Intensive academic institutes are hosted by a US college or university.
- Institutes are academic in nature, and focus on leadership, community issues and global issues.²⁶

- **Community College Initiative Program²⁷**

- Students from Brazil, Cameroon, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Panama, South Africa, and Turkey study in the U.S.
- Students focus on leadership, professional skills and English, and study at a community college.

- **Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program²⁸**

- Fellowships for Master's for Eurasian students are awarded.

- **Global Undergraduate Exchange Program²⁹**

- One semester and academic year scholarships are awarded for undergraduate fellowships.

Metrics

Employing metrics to measure the impact of public diplomacy programs is key in determining their effects and benefits. Though it is difficult to quantitatively measure all the benefits of the educational exchange experience, a look at some of the statistics involved in academic exchange demonstrates some of the tangible benefits and opportunities in terms of audience.

Tangible benefits:

- 765,000 foreign college students studying in the U.S. contribute \$22.7 billion yearly to the U.S. economy.³⁰
- 46 academic or educational exchange alumni are members of the 113th U.S. Congress.³¹
- Over 80 heads of state or heads of government have been educated in the United States.³²
- 44 Alumni of the Fulbright Program have been awarded the Nobel Prize.³³
- Ban Ki Moon, current Secretary General of the United Nations, was an exchange student in California in 1962³⁴ and earned a master's degree from Harvard.³⁵

Target Audience:

- 50 percent of the world's population is younger than 30,³⁶ constituting a significant potential audience. Building relationships with youth through exchange may pay dividends for the U.S. decades down the line as they assume leadership roles in their countries.
- Tapping alumni networks offers significant opportunity for return investment. There are a variety of exchange alumni organizations. For instance, the International Exchange Alumni online community boasts 100,000 members,³⁷ and there are 20 Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) alumni groups.³⁸
- The Fulbright Program has had approximately 310,000 participants since 1946, and awards roughly 8,000 grants annually.³⁹ 68% of the 5,550 student participants were non-U.S. citizens.⁴⁰
- Exchanges with countries with significant Muslim populations have involved 6,890 students through the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study program since 2002.⁴¹
- Impact spreads beyond immediate program participants and reaches host families, friends, classmates, and others who interact with exchange program participants.

Conclusions

Academic exchanges are an effective use of U.S. funds, as they increase international relationships and exposure to U.S. values, culture and society. They also provide U.S. citizens with knowledge, skills and experience that make them more competitive and better able to exert influence in a globalized economy. Programs should be analyzed to explore the possibility of increasing the number of U.S. students abroad to attain a more even ratio of exchange.

Quantification of effect is important, and employment of additional metrics will help further demonstrate the effectiveness of exchanges. Alumni networks provide a mechanism for measuring the long-term effects

of academic exchanges, while offering opportunities for continued interactions, information, and influence. They should continue to be developed in order to ensure a lifelong connection to the U.S., and for U.S. participants to remain connected to foreign countries.

The skills and relationships built through academic exchange have direct national security consequences as participants become leaders in their countries of origin or in international organizations and as students learn foreign languages and cultural practices. Academic exchanges are thus a cornerstone of public diplomacy and influence, and are deserving of attention and funding.



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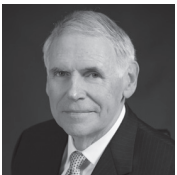
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We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

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