

Students of Democracy or American Spies?*

BY SERHIY KOSTYUK

It being the end of my first year as an international scholar in the United States, I have recently debated the role of U.S. Government-funded exchange programs with my fellows from New Independent States (NIS) of the former Soviet Union (FSU). Although everybody understands why he or she participated in the exchange program, none of the debaters could easily articulate a clear and definite statement of why exchange programs are needed by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and how this portion of American taxpayer's money is used to benefit the U.S. and post-Soviet republics. Reasons were couched in generalities, i.e., promoting educational opportunities and economic prosperity, strengthening democracy, and developing international ties. The only specific reason mentioned was the goal of training participants of these programs as American agents and viewing them as potential spies on their home countries for the U.S. (!?)

As a result of that debate, and after informally interviewing a dozen foreign and American students, and analyzing relevant qualitative and quantitative information, a research study on the academic training and academic exchange programs between the U.S. and NIS was conducted. This study attempts to address questions about the overall purpose of exchanges, mutual benefits and pitfalls generated, and the results accomplished. In the same fashion, and for better understanding of the philosophy of exchanges, this study provides empirical data that shows the wide range of exchange programs for NIS, the number of selected participants, and exchanges expenditures by the DOS. This paper outlines the scope of findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations for improvement of U.S. Government policy towards exchanges with NIS.

* The opinions expressed in the article are solely my own and do not represent official policy or positions of the U.S. Department of State, American Councils for International Education, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State U, Ukrainian Center for Economic & Political Studies, or any other organization or program, with which I am currently involved.

For the analysis, the Edmund S. Muskie/FREEDOM Support Act Graduate Fellowship Program was selected as a case study for illustrating many of the issues that are considered. Hereinafter, NIS refers to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

The Monster of International Education

It is estimated that more than **1.6 million** students now study outside of their home countries. The U.S. takes the lion's share of global education market (**30%**) and remains the top destination for the most international students. The statistics in the Institute of International Education (IIE), *Open Doors 2001: Report on International Educational Exchange*, show that a total of **547,867** foreign students were enrolled in bachelor's and graduate programs at American colleges and universities. By comparison, the U.K., who two years ago launched a \$7.78 mln worldwide marketing campaign to increase their number of international students by 75,000 and to have **25%** of the market share, has only **220,000** foreign students.

Foreign students make up **3.9%** of **14 mln** students in the U.S. *Open Doors 2001* reports that this year's 6.4% increase in international enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities is the largest increase in the past 20 years. Asian students comprise over one-half of all international enrollments (302,058), followed by students from Europe (80,584), Latin and South America (63,634), the Middle East (36,858), Africa (34,217), and North America (25,888).

The U.S. remains a key player in international exchanges, with over **600,000** alumni since World War II. According to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), about **5,000** Americans and **20,000** foreign visitors participated in exchanges in 2000 (see Figure 1).

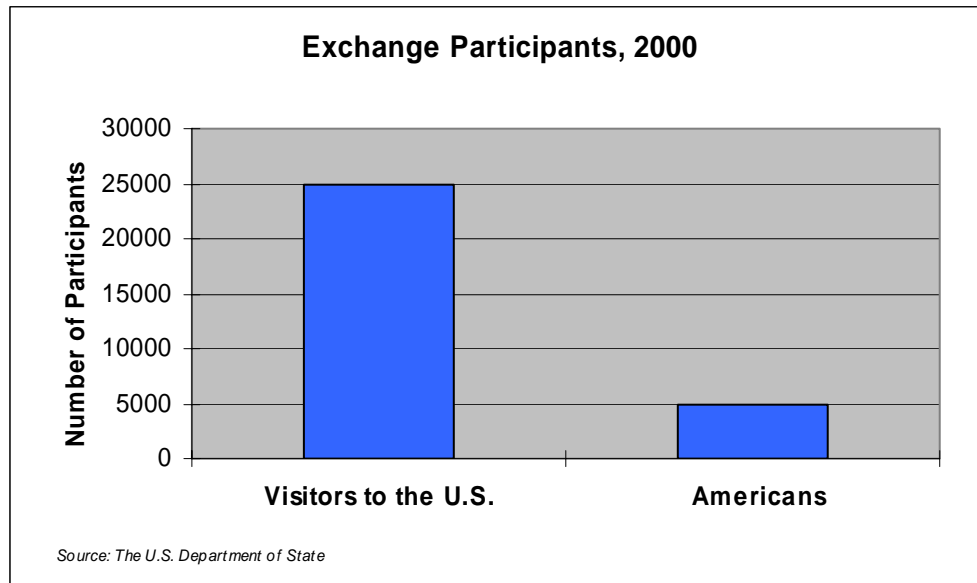


Figure 1

These activities substantively reached an estimated **6.25 mln** people in the U.S. and abroad, and afford the ECA partnership with over **1,000** organizations nationwide.

Strategically Important Region of the World

American journalists used to call the Soviet Union “the Prison of Nations.” This statement was grounded in hard data. The country, with a political center in Moscow, was comprised of 15 Soviet federated socialist republics and occupied 12 different time zones, extending from the North Pacific Ocean to the Baltic Sea, from deserts of Asia to the beaches of Crimea. Over 290 mln “Soviet people” represented more than 100 different national cultures. For two generations the USSR, with its 40,000 nuclear weapons pointed at the U.S. and its allies, threatened much of the world’s physical survival. Its policies, ideology and propaganda machine jeopardized American interests and values.

Since the USSR collapsed over a decade ago, some people think that the U.S. should not pay attention to the ruins of the Soviet empire. This is a mistake. The success or failure of transformation of NIS into partners in the world community makes a significant difference to the future of America. It is the difference between continuing the Cold War and meeting new challenges in the new century. And it is in the American interest to make this difference at the crucial moment in a historic transition to democracy and prosperous market-based economies.

A cornerstone for the continuing U.S. partnership with NIS has been **the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchanges Act (the Fulbright-Hays Act) of 1961**, and **the Freedom for Russia and Emerging Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA) of 1992**. As called for by Section 102 of the FSA, an Assistance and Economic Cooperation Strategy for all 12 New Independent States was prepared in January 1994. Year-by-year appropriation levels of funding under the FSA, covering the majority of exchange programs, are shown in Figure 2.

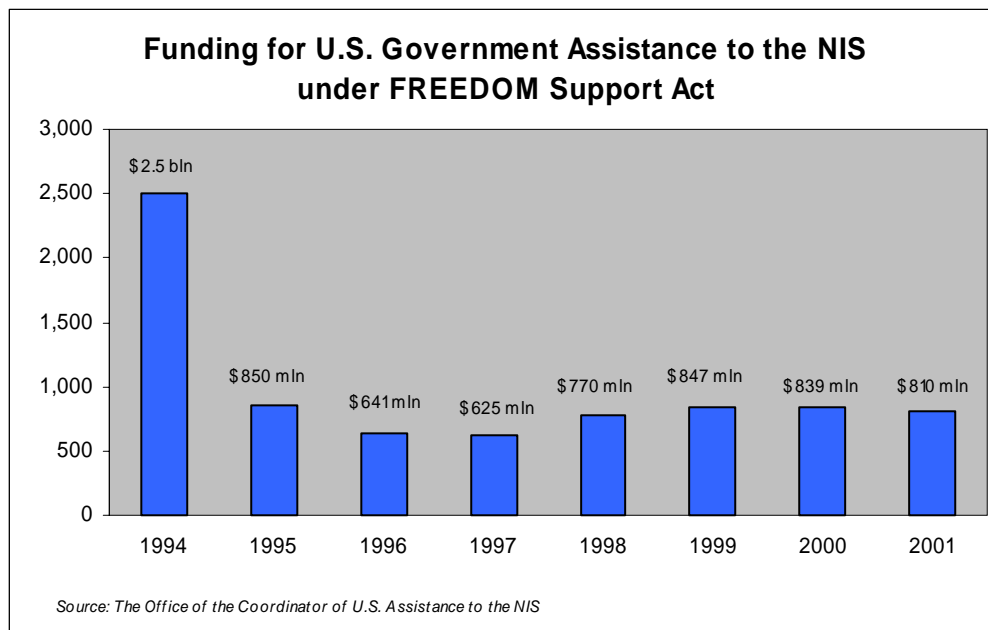


Figure 2

Into the International Community through Exchanges

Along with reducing threats from the former Soviet's weapons of mass destruction, preventing weapons proliferation, and promoting regional stability, exchanges of students and scholars have proven to be an extremely important component of the U.S. assistance effort in NIS. They are an essential part of the positive climate of American relationships with the region.

Over **80,000** NIS students, entrepreneurs, regional and local government officials, and other young professionals have participated in U.S. Government-funded exchange programs since 1993. Figure 3 reveals that one third (**33%**) of the global engagement of exchange participants is from NIS.

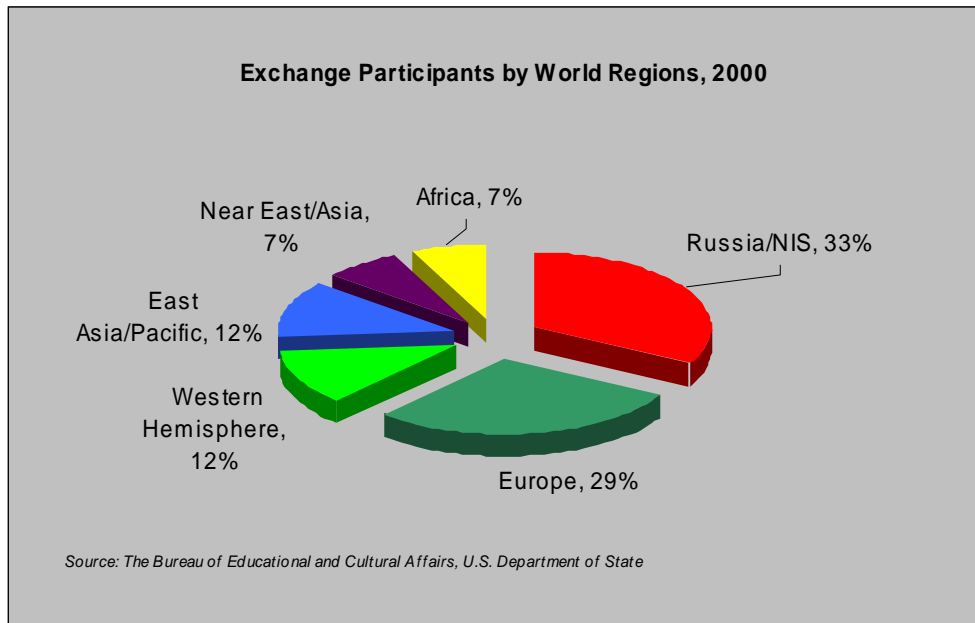


Figure 3

Programs include academic exchange at the undergraduate through post-doctoral levels, professional training, institution building, research, materials development, technical assistance, and consulting. In FY 2000 the DOS brought over 16,700 people. The breakdown of NIS participants by country is shown in Table 1.

NIS Participants and Expenditures, 2000

NIS	Participants			Expenditures	
	U.S. Grantees	Foreign Grantees	Total	Estimate (\$ in thousands)	
Armenia	48	283	331	7,833	
Azerbaijan	39	209	248	5,953	
Belarus	19	258	277	3,918	
Georgia	55	307	362	7,542	
Kazakhstan	49	306	355	6,456	
Kyrgyzstan	19	160	179	3,453	
Moldova	52	314	366	4,837	
Russia	585	2,758	3,343	39,749	
Tajikistan	4	52	56	1,151	
Turkmenistan	4	70	74	1,480	
Ukraine	299	1,651	1,950	28,454	
Uzbekistan	48	202	250	4,548	
NIS Multicountry	0	16	16	476	
Subtotal, NIS	1,221	6,586	7,807	115,850	
Grand Total	7,008	16,711	23,719	326,770	

Source: The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State

Table 1

Figure 4 illustrates that Russia and Ukraine occupy the first two positions by the number of DOS grantees visiting the U.S. for the purposes of studying, teaching, conducting research, and professional development, not only in NIS, but also around the world.

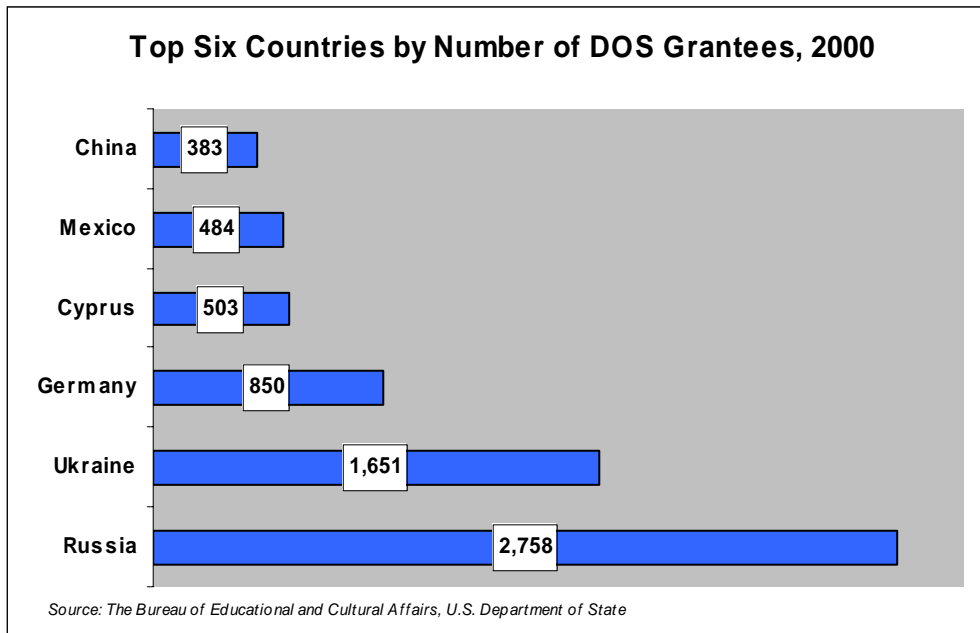


Figure 4

Currently the U.S. Government, through Public Affairs Sections at U.S. Embassies in NIS, American Councils for International Education, the International Research and Exchanges Board, Kennan Institute, the Open Society Institute, Fulbright Commissions, and a network of international advising centers, manages over 40 educational programs in and with the NIS.

In FY 2000, one ECA Bureau brought approximately **6,600** NIS citizens to the U.S. on short and long-term professional and academic exchange programs focusing on a wide range of topics related to democratic and free-market reform. Table 2 shows major U.S. Government-funded programs under the ECA. This does not include exchanges and fellowships sponsored by USAID, Library of Congress, U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other agencies.

Exchange and Educational Reform Programs for NIS, 2000			
Program	NIS participants	U.S. citizens	TOTAL
FREEDOM Support Act Grant Program	635	-	635
International Visitors (IV) Program	222	-	222
Citizens Exchanges*	192	165	192
Community Connections	1,750	-	1,750
Productivity Enhancement Program**	425	-	425
J. William Fulbright Program	97	93	190
NIS College and University Partnership Program	322	259	581
Partners in Education	103	24	127
NIS Educational Advising Centers (EAC)	61 EAC throughout the NIS		
Civic Education Curriculum Development Programs***	27	14	41
FSA Undergraduate Exchange Program****	308	-	308
Edmund S. Muskie/FSA Graduate Fellowship Program	367	-	367
Contemporary Issues Fellowship Program	77	-	77
Regional Scholar Exchange Program	80	11	91
Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX)	1,155	-	1,155
Secondary School Partnership	537	541	1,078
Teaching Excellence Awards	75	23	98
Armenia School Connectivity Program	12	12	24
Georgian "American Academy" Model School Project	5	-	5
Junior Faculty Development Program	92	-	92
English Language Programs	-	9	9
* The above numbers do not include the hundreds of participants who take part in the NIS-based program components, nor do they include the participants in the NIS-based training sessions that new NIS trainers conduct as part of the train-the-trainer model.			
** Russian participants were required to cover a portion of their program expenses.			
*** An additional 425 citizens in the NIS took part in the training components.			
**** An additional 12 participants from the Baltic States participated in the program under SEED and ECA base funding and OSI cost share.			
Source: U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union, FY 2000 Annual Report. Prepared by the Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to the NIS, January 2001.			

The DOS supports exchanges of students, educators and professionals through a broad range of programs that have a multiplier effect. The most important benefits of these programs for NIS are: (1) promotion of mutual understanding between former rivals; (2) integration of NIS countries into the international community by helping them to build an open society and promote democratic values and institutions; (3) promotion of political, economic, educational and other reforms in NIS; (4) obtaining qualified professionals who run the risks of transformations; (5) building of sustainable partnership between U.S. and NIS students and professionals, schools, universities and NGOs.

Although the DOS considers these programs “to be the most effective tool in reaching out to the next generation of NIS leaders to give them first-hand experience with the day-to-day functioning of a market-based, democratic system,” the success or failure of reforms will depend on the will and capacity of the peoples and governments of each individual state. In this regard, the

results of training, exchange, and educational reform programs will be visible in a long-term prospective.

When Americans Kill Two Birds with One Stone

Despite obvious advantages for the recipients, international exchanges appear to be more than just an act of American goodwill. According to *Homeland Security Directive-2*, as of October 30, 2001, President Bush stressed that the U.S. benefits greatly from international students who study in America. Indeed, these benefits are thought to yield such outcomes as a positive climate for U.S. global leadership, sound American science, and education and stronger domestic economy. Specified are seven integrated reasons why the U.S. Government shall continue to support educational and cultural exchange programs and increase the number of international students and scholars in the U.S.

First, international students and scholars in America are a crucial foreign policy asset. *U.S. Department of State Performance Plan for Fiscal Years 2001-2002* emphasizes that some **68%** of ECA programs have a nonadvocacy nature. That is to say, they do not support in any but indirect ways the 16 strategic goals of the DOS. One of those goals is improvement and strengthening of the international relations of the U.S. and promoting better mutual understanding between the U.S. and foreign nations.

In his book, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Dr. Joseph Nye, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Clinton administration, argues that in the coming century, as world leader, America will rely less on its "hard power" (military, economic and diplomatic might) and more on "soft power" (the power that derives from the appeal of American culture, values and institutions).

As a vital component of assistance to NIS, exchange programs also help to achieve tactical foreign policy goals. For example, in 2000, FSA assistance to Russia, as in previous years, was

subjected to a **50%** cut, mandated by the U.S. Congress as a punitive measure for alleged Russian transfers of nuclear technology to Iran. In the same fashion, in 2002 a **\$16 mln** reduction in funding to Ukraine from the FY 2001, was due to concerns about continuing setbacks to needed reform and the unresolved deaths of prominent dissidents and journalists (*U.S. Senate Resolution 205*, 2002). In both cases, budget cuts caused reduction in the number of DOS grantees. In contrast, under a new alliance of the Bush administration with Uzbek President I.Karimov in the war on terrorism (approximately 1,500 U.S. troops are now deployed in Uzbekistan), the U.S. has tripled aid to this former Soviet republic, to a total of **\$160 mln** per year. And in this regard, experts estimate that the number of DOS Uzbek grantees will be doubled.

Second, foreign students are the boosters for American education and science. The OECD's data reveals that U.S. schools are the least efficient in the industrial world. American year-to-year gains in student academic achievement are among the smallest. In science, U.S. progress ranked second to last – with **78%** of the average gains of foreign students (Finn C. and Walberg J. *The World's Least Efficient Schools*, *The Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 1998). Motivation and talents of foreign students have made them the leaders of graduate research in America. According to *the National Science Foundation* (NSF), the U.S. has benefited from non-U.S. scientists and engineers for many years and in many areas, including **access to valuable skills** and **greater ability to exploit the development of new knowledge abroad**. A NSF report, *Science & Engineering Indicators, Overview the U.S in a Changing World*, from April 30, 2002, shows that the percentage of foreign-born individuals among U.S. scientists and engineers (S&E) is growing at all degree levels, in all sectors, and in most fields. By the end of the decade, one in four S&E doctorate holders had been born abroad.

In 2001, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State U (who intends to be one of the highest rated schools in the nation by 2007), hosted foreign students from 44 countries; these students covered **61** out of **91** graduate research assistant positions for that year.

America, like a powerful magnet, attracts the best students from around the world. Figures 5, 6 and 5 reveal the scope of competition for DOS fellowships of three selected programs in the NIS.

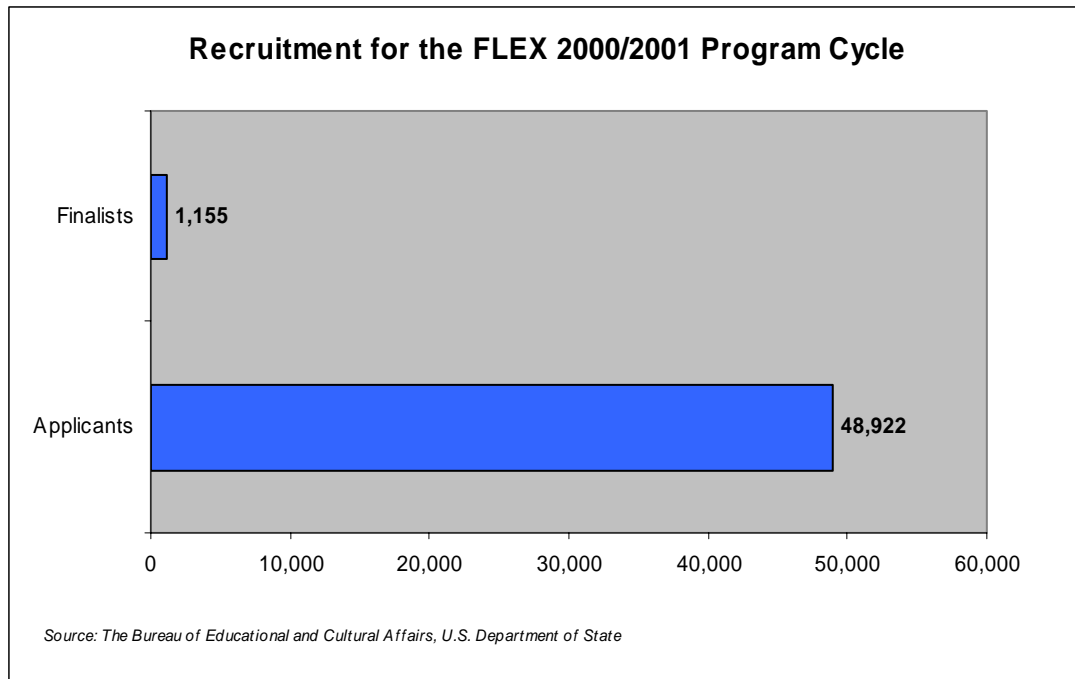


Figure 5

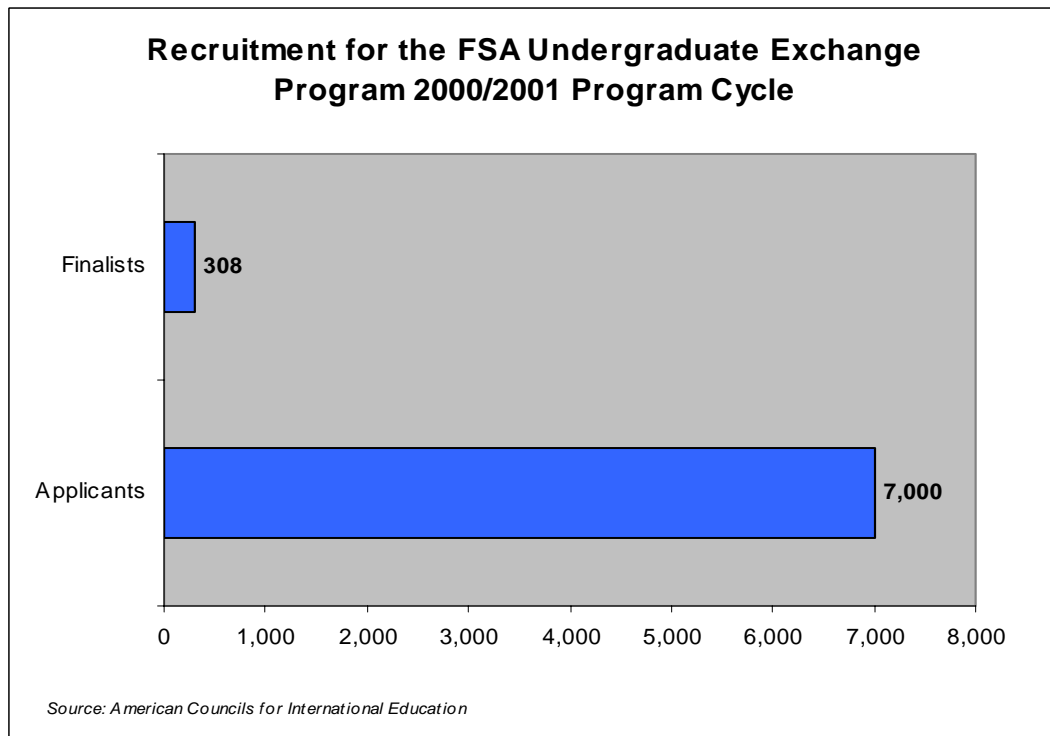


Figure 6

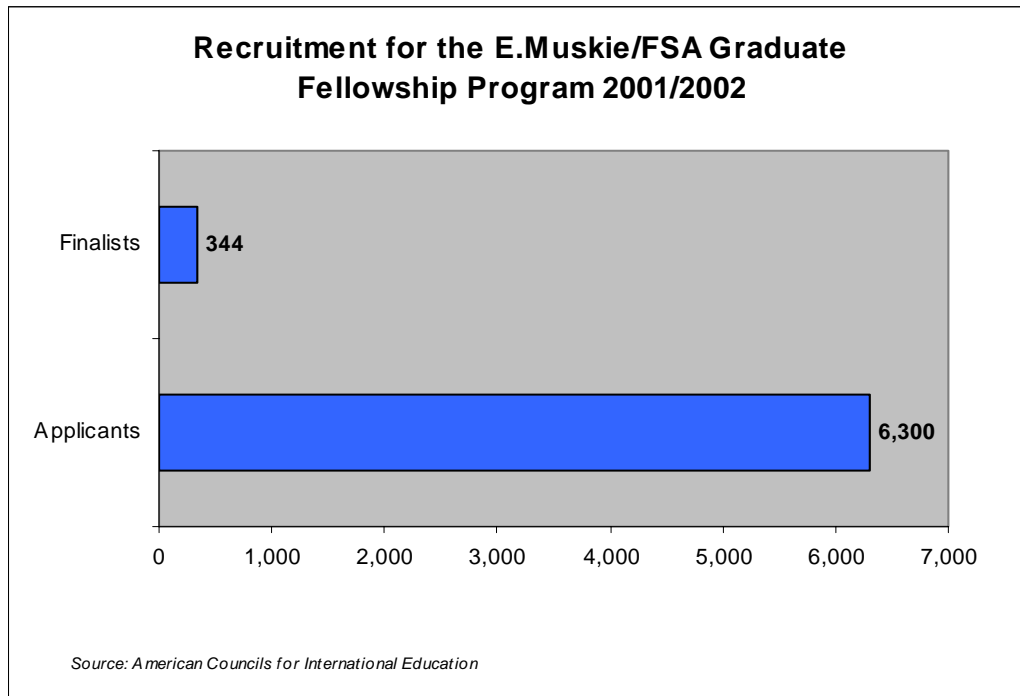


Figure 7

Third, international education is the fifth largest service sector export. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that annually, international students add more than **\$13 bln** to the American economy. This comes from their expenditures on tuition and living expenses, including housing, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, recreation and entertainment, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items. Over three-quarters of these students receive most of their funding from sources outside America. This export of services industry supports over **100,000** U.S. jobs.

Fourth, exchange programs are an invaluable investment in public diplomacy. A broad worldwide network of men and women provides an effective linkage with America. These people, whom Assistant Secretary for ECA, Patricia Harrison, called American “unofficial ambassadors,” play different social roles; and each of them is making a difference in their own countries every single day. Indeed, Muskie/FSA alumni report continued communication with American friends (71%), professors (59%), and professional contacts (70%) from the internship. The majority (54%) reported that they personally had a “great deal” of influence on society (*Muskie/FSA Graduate*

Fellowship Program Evaluation Report by the University of Iowa Social Science Institute, January 2002). Therefore, alumni help to establish a climate in which the U.S. is not viewed as selfish and motivated only by self-interest or, in S.Huntington's words as a "rogue superpower." And it is easier for U.S. executives and diplomats to do business with people who are familiar with America, especially after September 11th. In this regard, we can point to half of the leadership of the U.S. President's coalition against terrorism as being comprised of those who either studied in America or came here on International Visitors Program.

William Rugh, who served as an Ambassador to Yemen and the United Arab Emirates, argues that, probably, had S.Hussein come to the U.S. as a Fulbright student, he would have a real appreciation of how Americans think, and would not have made that terrible mistake of invading Kuwait in 1990 (If Saddam Had Been a Fulbrighter, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 2, 1995).

Fifth, alumni promote American values around the world. President Bush, in his State of the Union address, talked about American values that Americans believe are universal. For example, 43% of Muskie/FSA alumni are employed by foreign firms or governments. A majority of alumni have key democratic and market orientations and are significantly less likely to trade democracy for strong leadership in the NIS. 56% of Muskie/FSA alumni indicated that they thought a western-style democracy would be best for their country; they are more likely to pursue economic reform even if it means significant short term hardship for individuals (78%); they are less likely to favor incomes regulation (8%), and less likely (14%) to favor government guarantees of work and a high standard of living (*the University of Iowa Social Science Institute*, January 2002).

Sixth, foreign students bring value to American schools, students, professors, and society. On December 11, 2001, Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced bill S.1799, *The Homeland Security Education Act*, to strengthen the national security of the U.S. by encouraging and assisting in the expansion and improvement of educational program to meet critical needs at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels. In the same light, the President's *Memorandum on*

International Education Policy for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, as of April 19, 2000 calls for the Federal Government, in partnership with institutions of higher education and other educational organizations “to help Americans gain the international experience and skills they will need to meet the challenges of an increasingly interdependent world.”

Figure 8 shows that there is a huge imbalance between the number of Americans studying abroad and the number of foreign students hosted by the U.S. This indicates that exchange programs give American students outside perspective of the classroom. A friend of mine, from Emory U, told me that an announcement about a “boring” course, made by three students from the NIS, resulted in the doubling of number of American students want be to register for it.

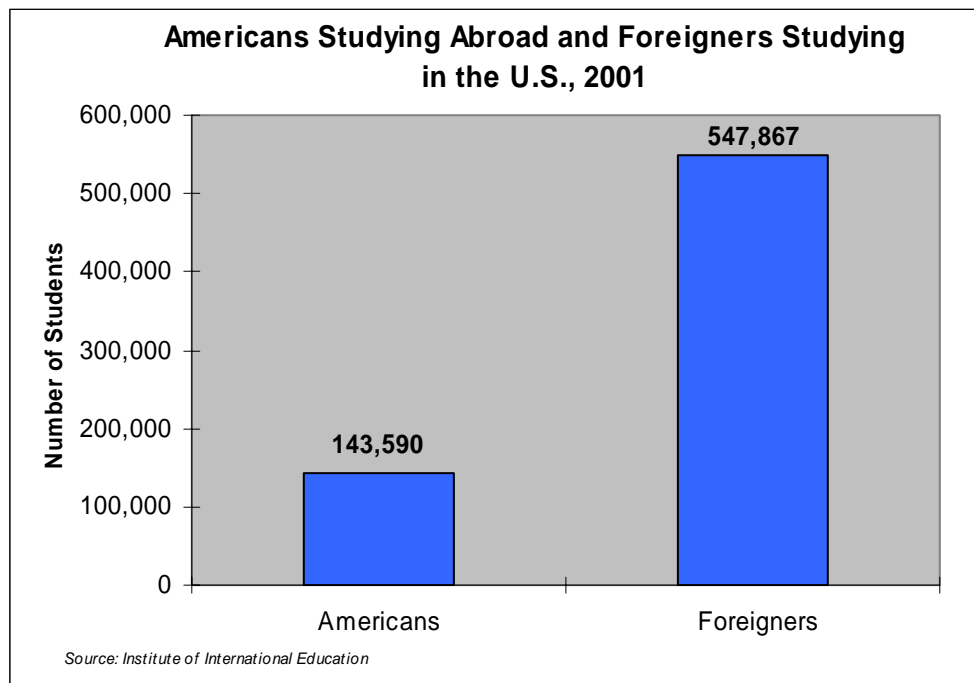


Figure 8

84% of U.S. host respondents surveyed reported that they developed a better understanding of foreign relations; 66% agreed that participation in exchanges were a life-changing experiences; and 55% reported that government relationship of exchange programs gives greater correspondence to the programs and demonstrates that the U.S., as a whole, is interested in the development and stability of other nations (*Pilot Study Evaluation of the Impact of International Exchanges on a U.S. Community: Greater Cincinnati, OH*, October 2001).

Dr. Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser and a former Provost at Stanford U, told the LA World Affairs Council, on January 15, 1999, how education had transformed people in American society:

“If you look at the fact that this is partially an immigrant story, so the fact that Madeleine Albright, the Secretary of State, is in fact an immigrant child, if you look at that in America you also see a very important story about the vibrancy of this democracy. And it continues.”

The NSF reported that **63%** of the **55,000** foreign-born students who earned doctorates in science and engineering from U.S. institutions between 1988 and 1996 planned to remain in America (*Population Bulletin, June 1999*).

Seventh, exchange programs produce world leaders and role models for millions of people. Among those non-Americans who were educated in the U.S. are **28** Nobel Prize honorees, and **46** current and **165** former heads of government and chiefs of state. Examples included, but not limited to: the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan (Macalester College); the EU Foreign Policy Chief, Javier Solana (U of Virginia); the President of France, Jacques Chirac (Harvard U); the President of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus (U of Illinois); Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres (Harvard U); King of Jordan, Abdullah Bin Al-Hussein (Georgetown U); Japanese Minister of State for Administrative Reform, Nobuteru Ishihara (Elmira College); former Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Nurlan Balgimbayev (U of Massachusetts); and former Prime Minister of Italy, Giuliano Amato (Columbia U). International exchanges produce leaders not only *in* America, but *for* America. At the age of 22, Bill Clinton, the 42nd U.S. President, attended Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar.

Some experts estimate that **30,000** alumni have impact on more than **seven million** people annually. Personally, the greatest impact on my professional career was made by two colleagues from the Ukrainian Centre for Economic & Political Studies (UCEPS), a leading NIS think tank where I served as a Program Coordinator: the President Anatoliy Grytsenko (U.S. Air War College), and Director for Energy Programs, “Fulbrighter” Volodymyr Saprykin (U of Alabama). Their

analytical skills, abilities to grasp new ideas and effectively cooperate with international partners, and desire to strengthen democratic principles and influence the policies of the Government, gave me a powerful incentive to seek an American degree and become a top policy analyst.

Dollar Diplomacy

Americans tend to assume that they provide too much foreign aid. According to groundbreaking studies of American public opinions on the most pressing global issues of the day, made by *Foreign Policy* magazine in September 2001, the average American estimates that about 20% of the U.S. federal budget goes to foreign aid. However, the real figure is less than 1%. To paraphrase Senator Chris Evans, “the full cost of the U.S. Navy’s patrols against unauthorized boat arrivals in 2000-01 was **\$635 mln** – or **\$1.7 mln** a day.” By comparison, the annual budget of E.Muskie/FSA Graduate Program, which has proven to be one of the most effective investments over the last decade, is approximately **\$20 mln**.

In his testimony at FY 2003 Budget Hearing before the Senate Budget Committee, Secretary Colin Powell said:

“We want to continue to enhance our educational and cultural exchange programs. The budget request includes **\$247 mln** for strategic activities that build mutual understanding and develop friendly relations between America and the peoples of the world. Such activities have gained a new sense of urgency and importance since the brutal attacks of September. We need to teach the world more about America, about our values system, what we believe in.”

The same applies to public opinion. **72%** of U.S. host respondents surveyed reported that public money should be used to support international exchange programs (*Pilot Study Evaluation*, October 2001).

Room for Improvement

On the one hand, U.S. Government-funded exchange programs are an essential part of the friendly U.S.-NIS relationship. They generate mutual benefits and strengthen understanding between former rivals. On the other hand, these programs are vulnerable to political speculations. They tend to cause anti-American campaigns in NIS mass media, especially during presidential or parliamentary elections. For example, a Ukrainian Internet newspaper *ProUa.com* wrote:

“Overall, America has started its activity in Ukraine gently and wisely. Resources were allocated, funds were established and programs for studies of our students and scholars abroad were organized. Participants of the programs were required to come back to the homeland. America deliberately and rather logically prepared personnel for itself and formed the environment for influence (Nataliya Tarchenko, *Is Uncle Sam Transmuting in the Werewolf?* March 2002).

In the same vein, alumni are often accused in pro-Americanism or espionage. A Russian informational and analytical periodical *Pravda On-line* wrote about aforesaid UCEPS human resources:

“The Centre staff resembles the Old Soviet joke about arts’ men in civilian clothes. The political scientists in the personnel also wear civilian clothes, but their clothes are made by best American tailors.... The current activities of the former alumni are realized with use of methods that are typical to special services, rather than political scientists. Furthermore, they try to attract specialists of the state organizations, those specialists who have access to top secret documentation” (Sergey Stelmakh, *The USA Interfering with Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine*, March 2002).

Another serious problem generated by exchanges is “brain drain.” More than **70,000** young scholars and professionals (up to 40 years old) emigrated from Russia since 1991. In 2001 alone, over **500** young scholars and professionals were dismissed from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine by their own initiatives. An even two year home residence J-1 visa requirement does not stop “renegades.” Significant numbers of alumni are living and working outside of their home countries. Therefore, long-term goals of the programs are jeopardized. According to a 2002 survey

by Center for Demography and Human Ecology at the Institute for the Public Economy Forecasting at the Russian Academy of Sciences, emigration potential of Russian students who study abroad is very high, almost 70%. Deterioration of standard of living seems to be the main force pushing people into the emigration stream. This is understandable when one considers that the average annual faculty salary at private and public colleges in Ukraine is \$700-5,000. To compare, an average faculty salary at private and public colleges in America is \$50,000-60,000. According to an annual *The Chronicle of Higher Education* survey, 86 private-college presidents earned \$300,000 or more in the FY 2000; of those 12 made \$500,000 or more.

Given the preceding analysis, the following policy recommendations for the DOS, and administrative organizations of the exchange programs, seem essential. **First**, U.S.-NIS exchanges should be continued and effectively supported, and the number of American participants should be considerably increased. **Secondly**, the PR-campaign of U.S. Government-funded exchanges with and in NIS should be changed to show the mutual benefits of these programs. Open and clear demonstration of the broad spectrum of significant benefits from exchanges might reduce the risk of political speculations in NIS and America. **Thirdly**, specific questions about the overall goals of exchanges and benefits for the U.S., as well as NIS, should be introduced during selection processes in NIS. **Finally**, systematic strategy towards keeping track of alumni and providing financial support to their endeavors, should continue to be developed. Alumni are the critical resource in supporting the exchanges, and they will be the key players implementing democratic reforms and stimulating economic development of their home countries.

And how about spies? Well... leave them to secret services.