



The Future of International Exchanges in a Post-Pandemic World

# Chapter 1

## Government-Funded Academic Exchanges

## THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

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# Government-Funded Academic Exchanges

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When historians look back at the year 2020, they will undoubtedly see the coronavirus pandemic, its economic and social damage, and the unprecedented standstill the world underwent before a slow recovery. Within higher education, scholars and practitioners had already called for a reexamination of current practices prior to the onset of the pandemic, with particular emphasis on finances, demographics, and technology (Alexander 2020). International education has likewise struggled with these challenges, made more acute by the devastating effects of COVID-19. Given its impact on mobility, the pandemic has forced the field to grapple with how to facilitate experiential learning without the in-person component. International educators were quick to move to new modalities and partnerships at the onset of the pandemic (Ogden, Streitwieser, and Van Mol 2020), but the question remains how mobility will be affected in the medium- and long-term.

Initial prognostications generally portend a slow recovery in student and scholar mobility (Marginson 2020; Mitchell 2020). The main reason for such a negative forecast is that much of the present mobility is dependent on individuals paying tuition fees from disposable income. Government-funded exchanges, however, are somewhat insulated from these forces by virtue of their support by public funds. Such government-funded exchanges have an equally important national purpose to their academic rationale: public diplomacy to increase mutual understanding among peoples of different countries and cultures.

Much as they helped maintain peace after World War II, these academic exchanges will have an active and influential role to play in the post-COVID-19 world. Yet, despite a strong history, government-funded exchanges in the post-COVID-19 future face several challenges. Using the Fulbright Program as an illustrative case study, this chapter provides a brief history of government-funded exchanges and identifies four areas of further action and study. This chapter argues that, to survive and remain relevant for future generations, Fulbright will need to continue to evolve to meet 21st century needs, continue to diversify to reflect the heterogeneity of the United States and partner nations, assume government funding is not guaranteed, and improve measurement of the impact of exchanges.

## A Brief History of Government-Funded Exchanges

Academic travel is as old as the oldest universities. During the Holy Roman Empire, Frederick Barbarossa decreed that law students traveling to the University of Bologna would receive royal protection to partake in their studies. Since the advent of the Westphalian system in the late 17th century, academic travel remained an elite scholarly activity with high prestige. The British Empire of the second half of the 19th century used traveling scholarships for both academic and imperial purposes via private trusts, leading to the Rhodes Scholarship in 1903 (Pietsch 2011). It was not until the 20th century that governments became involved in the world of academic exchange. World War I sparked an interest of governments and nonprofit organizations to establish international organizations with the goal of promoting world peace. The Institute of International Education was founded in 1919 for “the specific purpose of enabling our people to secure a better understanding of foreign nations and of enabling foreign nations to obtain accurate knowledge of the United States,

its people, institutions, and culture” (Duggan 1920, 1). Like the Rhodes Trust, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation in the US were active in establishing these exchanges (Schmidt 1999). In 1922, the first German student with a government scholarship traveled to the United States for study, a precursor to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD 2020b). Student and scholar exchange in the early years remained extremely exclusive in terms of participant demographics and home institutions due to limited funding available for travel and expenses, but were highly desirable to engender goodwill among nations (Duggan 1920). These efforts, however, were not enough to avoid a second global war in the first half of the 20th century.

The aftermath of World War II, including the destruction of much of Europe and Asia, saw a renewed interest in maintaining the peace. Academic exchanges received increased interest of governments as a vehicle for increasing mutual understanding among peoples. US Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas became the most influential advocate for such programs. Inspired by the Rhodes Scholarship, Fulbright saw the citizenship component of the academic exchanges in global rather than nationalistic terms (Mukherjee 2012). Reflecting on his own experience at Pembroke College, Oxford in the 1920s, Fulbright envisioned an exchange program that “encourages attitudes of personal empathy, the rare and wonderful ability to perceive the world as others see it” (Fulbright 1966, 177). The goal was to create person-to-person connections across national borders that would avoid the type of calamity that befell the globe in World War II.

Founded in 1946, the Fulbright Program had a structure that deviated from the Rhodes model. While maintaining the bilateral exchange model, it would attempt to reach all corners of the world. To do so, such an endeavor would require more than private financing. Rather, Fulbright envisioned a government-sponsored program that would provide the funding backbone to ensure its success (Johnson 2019). The government-funded nature of these academic exchanges would allow for the scale necessary to generate goodwill among nations, with one proponent suggesting at least 100,000 students each year (Woods 2019).

Building on the framework of privately financed exchange programs implemented during the interwar period, the US federal government took on the mantle of supporting the exchanges. The question remained, however, as to how to fund the program. In his wisdom, Fulbright proposed redirecting the proceeds from the sale of surplus war materiel in Europe and the Pacific rather than adding the cost to the discretionary budget (Johnson 2019). In effect, Fulbright was able to repurpose instruments of war for the goal of peace at a time when the world feared a third World War, this time between the United States and Soviet Union. The solution was only temporary as there was a finite supply of war surplus, but the experiment proved a success. And while the funding was more generous for US participants (all costs were covered) than foreign participants (only travel to the US was covered), the initial successes of the program led to the eventual addition of discretionary spending to the program. The Smith-Mundt United Information and Educational Exchange Act States in 1948 provided for program infrastructure on the US side and the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1961 opened bilateral exchange commissions that allowed funding from international partners (Johnson 2019). By fiscal year 2020, the US government budgeted approximately \$700 million to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (USASpending.gov 2020), the division of the State Department that oversees Fulbright and other exchange programs such as the International Visitor Leadership Program (Department of State 2020a). By the time of the pandemic, Fulbright had facilitated more than 390,000 student and scholar exchanges across more than 160 countries (Department of State 2020b).

## Fulbright's Evolving Mission

The year 2021 marks the 75th anniversary of the Fulbright Program. It is an understatement to say that the world has changed tremendously since the program's beginning and will change even more by the time Fulbright celebrates its 150th anniversary. The world continues to evolve geopolitically with a more multipolar alignment than the US-USSR dual pole world that marked the Cold War period (Ignat and Bujancă 2013). Similarly, the United States' position as the preferred destination for international students and scholars has diminished as other countries have developed their higher education systems (Goodman and Gutierrez 2011) and multilateral regional exchanges have grown in Europe through the Erasmus Programme (Bode and Davidson 2011). Similarly, academic research has become increasingly multipolar as more countries devote financial resources to scientific discovery (Veugelers 2010). Further, while the fears of global conflict are never truly extinguished, other exigent problems such as world hunger and climate change now compete for government resources. Government-funded exchanges remain a vital vehicle for addressing these global issues, while needing to adapt to a more challenging global higher education environment. Just as in post-World War II Europe, international exchange continues to have the potential to build and rebuild lasting relationships on personal, professional, and institutional levels.

The post-World War II period saw some of the greatest efforts to develop supranational organizations, including the United Nations, the European Coal and Steel Community, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. When Fulbright envisioned a program of international academic exchange, the goal was “to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship” (Fulbright 1965, viii). With much of Europe in ruins and facing the specter of another world war, this time with atomic weapons, the necessity for peaceful coexistence was paramount. Fulbright envisioned government-funded exchange as one tool to maintain peace by exposing young people to their peers around the globe.

By the 1990s, neoliberal free trade agreements, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the North American Free Trade Agreement, had opened the economic landscape globally. By 2020, student and scholar international mobility had become a more common phenomenon thanks in part to the easing of restrictions for study abroad by reducing government regulations related to student nationality, joint ventures, and limits on participants (Knight 2003). However, a growing counter-movement of anti-globalization, economic protectionism, and nationalism present in the decade before the pandemic threatens the ease of movement of people, or at least has made such ventures less desirable (Altbach and de Wit 2016; Ashwill 2017).

Concurrently, higher education globally has changed. Nations have poured resources into their higher education systems and entered the discussion of “world class” universities. Global league tables still dominated by the likes of Oxford, Harvard, and LMU Munich now see peers at Tsinghua University (China), National University of Singapore, and Seoul National University (South Korea). Moreover, developments beyond elite institutions have allowed what are sometimes termed “universal” (Trow 2007) or “high participation” (Marginson 2016) higher education systems that have democratized access to higher education. And with the growth of student and scholar mobility, many countries' ministries of education have formed their own international exchange programs. For example, the China Scholarship Council, founded in 1996, spends nearly half a billion US dollars each year on student and scholar exchanges with countries around the world (Fedasiuk 2020).

Moreover, the world's awareness of pressing problems continues to evolve, or more accurately, the world's attempts at collective action to address longstanding issues have become more formalized. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals offer a summary of these issues, including poverty, hunger, public health, education, inequality, and climate change. Although most government-funded exchanges like Fulbright were never meant to be development programs, international collaboration to address issues affecting both partners remains a priority. For example, Fulbright scholars have taken on projects to address issues such as migration as well as COVID-19 from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds (Sasaki et al. 2020). Going forward, government exchange must be a vessel for addressing these global issues.

Accomplishing these goals will be difficult due to the changes in global higher education since the start of these exchange programs. In the United States, the shift in the academic labor market towards adjunct faculty, with the unstable nature of such appointments, limits the pool of potential scholars who will apply to the program. The challenges go beyond accepting adjunct faculty into exchange programs, but rather making the experience economically viable while advancing the participant's career. Even for tenure-track faculty members, leaving the home campus for a significant amount of time may present challenges as part of developing the tenure portfolio. Campuses that espouse global value statements can ameliorate this issue by pausing tenure clocks for scholars who go on exchange programs. For European partners, the Bologna Process that has harmonized higher education systems and credentials across the continent may in fact make it more difficult for non-European exchange scholars to take part in teaching given different academic structures, programs, and teaching methods. For example, the European university culture's predilection towards more student autonomy and one final exam making up a term's grade may be drastically different than the more structured approach with formative assessments typical in a US classroom. Globally, the competitive grant market, whether the US National Science Foundation or the EU's Horizon program, offers many options for scholars to engage in cutting-edge research without the public diplomacy piece that is part of programs like Fulbright. In addition, funding opportunities come from a wider range of countries, including China, Russia, and Brazil. With many more options for funding than 75 years ago, Fulbright faces challenges to recruit scholars working on novel research.

The public diplomacy piece, however, remains one of the greatest strengths of programs such as Fulbright and must continue to be central to their operation. With all the geopolitical changes in the last 75 years, one of the most prominent has been the dampening of relations between the United States and its European allies. European perceptions of the United States dipped after the US invasions of Vietnam and Iraq and took a sharp downward turn during the administration of President Donald Trump (Wike et al. 2018) and the country's response to the coronavirus pandemic (Wike, Fetterolf, and Mordecai 2020). Nations like the United States cannot assume positive feelings will continue to persist without a concerted effort to promote goodwill among its closest allies. Modernizing programs such as Fulbright that bring people together will be vital to rebuilding these relationships as the next generation of leaders pursues "the acquisition of empathy—the ability to see the world as others see it, and to allow for the possibility that others may see something we have failed to see" (Fulbright 1989, 217). The program's strong foundation can be re-envisioned to expand participation to meet 21st century needs.

## Diversifying Exchanges

Another part of the evolution of government-funded exchanges will be the question of who is representing the partners. As pluralistic countries, partner nations have a responsibility to reflect the diversity of their countries both in the sending and receiving of students and scholars. The global reaction and racial reckoning following the murder of George Floyd in the United States was just the most recent highlight of the inequities across societies. US higher education has taken upon itself to diversify its institutions and try to reduce inequities in terms of access and outcomes, but serious issues remain. Moreover, government-funded exchange programs and international mobility reinforce the unequal power structures, many of which exist at the undergraduate level that feeds into graduate exchange programs. For example, international mobility among US students and scholars remains highly stratified in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Lingo 2019).

Exchange programs such as Fulbright must be able to expand to historically underrepresented groups as well as institutions, including, in the United States, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other minority serving institutions. Data shows the inequities in education abroad programs within US higher education, particularly in low participation for students of color, first-generation students, low-income students, and men (Sweeney 2013; Thrush and Victorino 2016). Government-funded exchange programs can help ameliorate funding concerns for students from underrepresented backgrounds and can be a key recruitment tool for the programs.

In addition, US diversity recruitment efforts must reach beyond elite coastal research universities and liberal arts colleges to locate talented students and scholars to represent the nation as part of these exchanges. The shift towards online modalities due to the coronavirus pandemic may present an opportunity for better engagement--from recruitment to alumni status-- given the ability to reach more institutions and potential scholars with on-demand sessions rather than place-based sessions limited by time constraints. Doing so can diversify the cadre of cultural ambassadors the United States sends around the world.

More than just attention to the recruitment pipeline, diversifying participation in exchange programs requires a paradigm shift in how potential projects are evaluated. Historically, participants came from elite institutions, often the most prepared in terms of secondary and higher education. Their institutions also offer the most support to potential scholarship applicants, often coaching applicants through the essays and application process and relying on the institution's reputation as social capital (Lee and Brinton 1996). The evaluation process should consider the inequities in terms of assistance and the wider impact of the proposed project as a citizen diplomacy tool when determining grant awards.

On the partner side, diversifying access to exchange programs is just as pressing an issue. For example, including more residents of former East Germany remains a challenge in the German context. In Austria, first-, second-, and third-generation individuals from migrant backgrounds participate at lower rates. Indigenous populations in Australia and New Zealand face discrimination throughout the higher education system. In addition, the stratification of higher education and the inherent tracking schemes lead to the underrepresentation of sectors of the university system in international exchange. For example, the *Fachhochschulen* (universities of applied sciences) and vocational education training (VET) institutions can equally benefit from the exchange of students and scholars much like universities such as the Technical University of Munich. US community colleges and German VET institutions may make an excellent pairing for scholar exchange given the more applied and vocational nature of their institutions. Bilateral agreements between higher education associations like the American Association of Community Colleges and the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics can forge natural relationships based on common missions. Collaborations can also establish a

clearinghouse of global best practices that can also promote participation from underserved groups. Exposing the heterogeneity of the higher education systems on both sides of the partnerships will extend the benefits beyond the elite sectors of learning and research.

## Funding

Accomplishing these ambitious goals requires significant government resources to ensure a successful future of exchanges. To that end, the Fulbright Program has come a long way from its humble beginnings funded by war materiel to a program in which funding comes from both respective governments. In the United States, exchange programs have enjoyed broad bipartisan support, even during some of the most polarizing periods due to their sterling reputation (Morello 2017). But this support cannot be assumed to be definite, going forward.

International exchanges make up a small fraction of government expenditures and face competition with the priority of subsidizing undergraduate, and in some cases, graduate education. In many European countries such as Germany, public commitments to higher education remain high and include generous subsidies for exchange programs like Fulbright and Erasmus (DAAD 2020a). As many partner nations often meet and exceed the US government's contributions to international exchange programs, the future of these programs will depend on stronger financial commitments from the US federal government. As pre-WWII history shows private investment cannot meet the scale of today's programs and may not be desirable from a public diplomacy perspective.

Increasing funding for higher education in the US, particularly international exchanges, will be difficult post-pandemic. Despite their importance as tools of citizen diplomacy and academic exchange, such programs reach a relatively small portion of the population and risk being labeled "elite." A central obstacle to increased funding by the US federal government is a decline in public trust of higher education. While Americans generally acknowledge the individual benefits of higher education exchanges in the form of higher earnings and employment potential, the non-monetary benefits of international exchange, such as advancing mutual understanding, are more difficult to explain to the general public. Moreover, the federal budget prioritizes student aid to reduce high tuition costs and research funds for discovery. Despite broad bipartisan support for international exchange, the future will likely portend stagnant funding amid the calls for relieving student debt and making the first two years of college free in the United States.

While international exchanges have a strong reputation and widespread support, governments and institutions cannot assume this will continue to be the case in an environment of nationalism and anti-global fervor. For example, the rapid expansion of one of China's most notable exchange programs, the Confucius Institutes, has garnered much publicity and criticism in their short time on university campuses around the world. In the United States, the Confucius Institutes have been deemed "foreign missions" due to their strong relationship with the Chinese government (Green-Riley 2020). Frayed geopolitical rivalries can have a negative impact on the future of exchanges. It is no coincidence that the US terminated its Fulbright program to China amid the rising tensions (Albert 2020). For scholars who conduct research, the prospect of espionage and intellectual property threat is a fear of governments and host institutions. During the Cold War, the US CIA and Soviet KGB were suspicious of foreign spies using exchange programs to gather intelligence (Edgerton 1997; Zhuk 2017). Although such instances can be politicized to align with foreign policy rhetoric, exchange programs may be more scrutinized if they are perceived as the vehicle in which an incident occurs. For reference, student visa programs were heavily restricted after the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks and additional



regulatory barriers have been implemented even after the terror threat abated. While such incidences are rare, they demonstrate the risk exchange programs face, whether to geopolitical tensions, major public events, or scandals.

Even without geopolitical tensions, more heavily funded competition from other countries may divert potential international applicants away from the US to other countries. Increased expenditures on foreign exchange demonstrate China's interest in challenging the United States' position as the leading destination for international exchange and aligns with the country's economic and political ambitions, including the Belt and Road Initiative. And with China's emphasis on creating well-funded world-class universities through Project 211 and Project 985, the country aims to be a higher education leader for the rest of the 21st century. To keep up, countries like the US and Germany will have to devote considerable resources to their higher education systems, including their exchange apparatuses.

## Measuring Impact

One of the most effective mechanisms for demonstrating the need for public funding is empirical evidence. Policymakers can make stronger cases to their constituents as to the return on public investment with empirical evidence of the program's value. Impact studies that show clear results of both individual and societal benefit can offer justification for increased spending during budgetary difficulties such as the recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Moreover, detailed study of academic exchange programs can highlight efficiencies and inefficiencies in the administration of programs such as Fulbright and Erasmus. Again, academic exchange programs utilized by a small fraction of the higher education population, which itself is a minority in most countries, cannot be assumed to be on safe economic footing when competing with other funding priorities.

Current efforts at providing an insight into the impact of academic exchange programs are often anecdotal, retrospective, and prone to respondent bias. Strong empirical methods of study are valuable not only as an evaluative tool, but also for future program improvement. One such example is *Global Impact and the Fulbright Effect*, a report by the Institute of International Education that explores "the medium- and long-term impacts of the Fulbright Program related to knowledge sharing, mutual understanding, changes at the organizational, community, and societal levels" (Valuy 2020). This retrospective study of participants from 2005 to 2015 identifies the positive impacts of Fulbright on teaching and learning at the home institution, the promotion of international exchange, and the building of mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the peoples of other countries.

Building on these initial efforts, future evaluative work should employ rigorous social science methods to bolster these findings. Quantitative studies utilizing a pre/post design can demonstrate individual growth of participants. For example, the Global Perspective Inventory is an assessment measuring the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development linked to an overseas experience and is commonly used in education abroad (Braskamp, Braskamp, and Merrill 2009). Building off existing outreach to alumni, future study into the impact of exchange programs can clarify the long-term impact on host higher education systems and wider society. Qualitative studies have the potential to elucidate both the personal and societal impact of exchange programs. An important topic of study is the impact on teaching and learning because of the international exchange of faculty. There is no single disciplinary perspective that ought to dominate this scholarly discourse, but such work can be built on research being done in the social and behavioral sciences, including participatory action research.

Measuring social impact will be one of the greatest challenges in the years ahead. It will be incumbent upon the advocates for academic exchanges to find the appropriate indicators for measuring public diplomacy and exchange programs as government funding agencies will have their hands full making difficult decisions. Fortunately, scholars in international relations, public affairs, and political science have tackled measuring social impact of academic exchanges (Fu 2018; Scott-Smith 2008)

Even amid calls to pull back from global networks, there remains a populist message for academic exchanges as part of an overall citizen diplomacy strategy. Such an argument, of course, can be made better with empirical data to support their continuation through public funding. But an important part of this strategy will be to show public, not just private, benefits of international exchanges. If exchanges more closely resemble the grant funding of the US National Science Foundation or the EU's Horizon Programme without demonstrable public benefit, a skeptical public can lobby their representatives to shift funding to other priorities.

## Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the world and exchange programs will look significantly different by the time Fulbright celebrates its sesquicentennial in 2096. The coronavirus pandemic has allowed for a critical reflection on the state of government-funded exchanges such as Fulbright. As in many areas of world society, the pandemic has further exposed issues already present. But the unprecedented pause in international exchanges is a moment to plan for the future. In particular, it is vital to the future of exchanges that their missions evolve to meet 21st century problems while maintaining their citizen diplomacy roots. Further, programs of students and scholars must reflect the diversity of their sending nations. And in a time of uncertain funding, measuring the successes of international exchanges can buttress against any public skepticism as to their value in challenging federal budgets. Despite these challenges, exchanges have a long and solid history of accomplishment on which to build a successful and meaningful future.

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