

## International Education as an Agent of Democratization

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### Abstract

This paper is guided by Aaron Benavot's (1999) question "What are the specific mechanisms and processes linking higher education and increasing levels of democracy in the recent period?" Benavot suggests that one research approach should focus on "students studying abroad, particularly those in North American or Western European universities, where foreign students often receive firsthand exposure to democratic institutions and practices." My thesis is that the U.S. government is keenly aware of the impact international students have on the U.S. while studying here and is optimistic that these students will apply democratic principles and systems upon return to their home countries. The United States continues to allocate significant funds annually towards exchange programs such as its flagship Fulbright Program and works hard to create new opportunities for foreign citizens to come to the U.S. to study and be exposed to democratic processes and principles. This research paper examines international education policy of the United States since 2000 and the efforts taken to welcome international students and expose them to democratic institutions. The objective is to determine if the implementation of various laws and regulations in the United States adhere to the objectives of the international education policy set forth by President Clinton in 2000. A comparative perspective on the international education policy of the United Kingdom which is the second leading destination for students who are studying internationally was also completed. Understanding the perspectives of the United Kingdom and the international education policies that government has created to expose international students to democratic institutions and practices will be important to this investigation.

Since the end of World War II the number of internationally mobile students continues to increase on a world wide annual basis. The flow of students between countries creates a learning opportunity like no other. International education creates an environment of cultural understanding that exposes participants to new and different approaches to life, ways of thinking, and governance. Only when we are able to develop an understanding of others and we can appreciate our differences will we be able to have civil dialogue and work together on the world problems of tomorrow. International education and exchange plays a significant role in bringing the world together. This paper is inspired by Aaron Benavot's question, "what are the specific mechanisms and processes linking higher education and increasing levels of democracy in the recent period?" (1999, p. 79). Benavot recommends that one research approach to answering this question should concentrate on international students studying abroad in Western Europe and North American colleges and universities, where exposure to democratic practices is plentiful, in order to understand the effects these educational experiences have on the development of democratic governments and practices upon their return home. This research paper will examine international education policy of the United States since 2000 and the efforts taken to welcome international students in order to expose them to democratic institutions. The objective is to determine if the implementation of various laws and regulations in the United States adhere to the objectives of the international education policy set forth by President Clinton in 2000. I will also develop a comparative perspective on the international education policy of the United Kingdom which is the second leading destination for students who are studying internationally. During the 2000-2001 academic year, the United States and the United Kingdom hosted 51% of all students studying internationally with 547,092 studying in the United States and 222,576

studying in the United Kingdom (Koh Chin, 2003). Understanding the perspectives of the United Kingdom and the international education policies that government has created to expose international students to democratic institutions and practices will be important to this investigation. In order to carry out this research, I will review a variety of policy documents, reports and statements made by key members of the U.S. and British governments on international education issues and the objectives these governments have in facilitating the flow of international students across borders.

In 1945, as a direct response to the tragedy of World War II, the late Senator J. William Fulbright introduced legislation sponsoring exchange programs for students and faculty between the United States and foreign countries that was eventually signed into law by President Harry S. Truman on August 1, 1946. Fulbright (1976) stated that “it is...fair to say that the Exchange Program is an instrument of foreign policy, not just for the United States, for all participating nations – as well as a memorable educational experience for the individual participants” (p. 2). The Fulbright Act set in motion a great history of international exchange between the United States and the rest of the world. Many believe in Senator Fulbright’s view of international education and that by opening doors to international students we are exposing the next generation of foreign leaders to democracy in action. Several current world dignitaries and leaders previously studied in or officially visited the United States and/or in the United Kingdom at some point during their careers where they were exposed to democratic processes. Current United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan earned a degree in Economics from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1961. Afghan President Hamid Karzai was one of nine participants on a U.S. Department of State International Visitors Program from Afghanistan in a 1987. And, King Abdullah Bin Al-

Hussein of Jordan after completing his secondary education in both the United Kingdom and the United States went on to attend Oxford University in 1984 to study International Politics and World Affairs and then returned to the U.S. to attend the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University where he was a Mid-Career Fellow in Advanced Study and Research in International Affairs under the support of the Master of Science in Foreign Service Program (AIEF, 2004; DiscoverJordan.com, 2001; U.S. Department of State, 2002). More importantly, there have been thousands of educators, legislators, journalists and business leaders from around the world who have studied in the United States and the United Kingdom and have taken away from these experiences a better understanding of democracy and the motivation for creating and maintaining a democratic society in their home countries. This was highlighted during a 2000 U.S. State Department dinner honoring international education where Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke to the importance of international education and stated:

Today, Fulbright alumni are building a democratic Bosnia, bridging the digital divide in West Africa, keeping Americans informed about developments in southern Europe, and fighting HIV/AIDS in Guatemala. Our Humphrey alumni are doing equally impressive things from managing immigration in Macedonia to advocating the rights of Filipino migrant workers, to serving on the Supreme Court of Brazil.

Earlier in the same year, during a speech given at the La Maison Française in Washington, D.C., Secretary of Education Richard Riley, who is a staunch supporter of international educational exchange, discussed his Department's efforts in promoting democracy through education and emphasized:

I strongly believe that the growth of democracy, economic prosperity and economic stability throughout the world is linked to the advance of education. This is one of the strongest reasons why the United States should have an active and strong international education agenda. Education and democracy go hand in hand...All throughout the world there are thousands of leaders in other nations-political, economic and social leaders-who got a taste of democracy in all of its complexity when they came to study here in the United States. (2000)

Secretary Riley delivered these remarks on the same day that President Clinton signed his executive memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies implementing a national international education policy. President Clinton's memorandum implementing an international education policy for the United States was the first of its kind. Never before in the history of the United States had international education been highlighted and celebrated in such a manner. President Clinton proclaimed that "we are fortunate to count among our staunchest friends abroad those who have experienced our country and our values through in-depth exposure as students and scholars" (2000). This same message has been repeated in some manner by the President and Secretaries of Education and State each November since the inaugural International Education Week held November 13-17, 2000.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 changed the world and our approach to international educational issues. The fear of terrorism and the decline of students studying abroad around the globe were real issues of concern to the international education community. On November 13, 2001, President George W. Bush released the first message of his presidency opening International Education Week which was the first such message after the terrorist attacks in Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. and New York. In his message, President

Bush declared that the United States must reaffirm its commitment to international education by promoting opportunities for U.S. students to study abroad and to encourage more international students to come to the U.S. to study. Although the United States is currently fighting a war on terrorism and U.S. troops are actively engaged in combat operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush Administration maintains its stance towards welcoming international students and scholars while ensuring secure borders. Secretary of State Colin Powell affirmed this position while speaking at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Reception for Humphrey Fellows and Foreign Diplomats in Washington, D.C. on November 15, 2004 on the importance of international exchange and scholarship stated:

This wonderful experience will put you in touch with America's next generation of leaders. Together you will build the partnerships and lay the foundations for future collaboration and exchange. You will work together to apply the best knowledge we have to the biggest challenge we face as one international community: Promoting democratic principles, creating free and vibrant economies, curing HIV/AIDS. These are not simply American goals that we are trying to accomplish. They are universal goals, universal human aspirations...one of you may help your country chart it's long awaited course to freedom and democracy.

The real task for the Bush Administration in the coming term is to convince the world that the United States is an open society by reaching out to prospective international students and scholars by reevaluating existing immigration regulations and refining procedures in order to create the most efficient and welcoming system possible.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair understands the implications of international education on both the domestic and international level and has been a strong advocate for

international education since he assumed office. On June 18 1999, Mr. Blair launched a new international education policy for the United Kingdom. During his announcement at the London School of Economics and Political Science of his new educational initiative, Prime Minister Blair introduced a government-wide effort to attract more students from overseas to study in the United Kingdom. Mr. Blair explained that the future leaders of tomorrow come to the United Kingdom for an education and declared that “people educated here have a lasting tie to our country. They promote Britain around the world, helping our trade and our diplomacy. It is easier for our executives and our diplomats to do business with people familiar with Britain.” The main objective of the United Kingdom’s 1999 international education initiative was to become the world’s leading destination for international students with an increase of 50,000 students by the year 2005 (British Council, 1999).

The United States continues to allocate significant funds annually towards exchange programs such as its flagship Fulbright program and works hard to create new opportunities for foreign citizens to come to the U.S. to study and be exposed to democratic processes and principles. For example, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs recently developed the Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program for students from predominately Muslim countries and the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program for students 15 to 17 years of age from countries of the former Soviet Union. Student participants spend a year living with host families and studying in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. On Election Day, November 2, 2004, these programs offered a unique opportunity for program participants to see democracy in action and learn about the U.S. political process first hand. Students attended a State Department briefing on the U.S. electoral process followed by a tour of a local polling place where they observed voting, discussed the political process

and asked questions of local election officials (McIntosh, 2004). In addition, the U.S. government continues to evaluate existing funding and exchange opportunities in an effort to enhance current programs and create new exchange opportunities. For example, the YES program, saw 160 students from Nigeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza, Egypt, Kuwait, Malaysia, Syria, Yemen, Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia participate in the first year. The YES program was an overall success and as a result, the State Department plans to increase the total number of participating students to 480 and include students from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, India, Morocco, Oman, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the Arab community in Israel (Nash & Bullock, 2004). The United Kingdom is also committed to allocating significant funds to international education scholarships and fellowships for both domestic students studying abroad and for international students seeking to study in the United Kingdom. The Chevening Scholarships Programme is the British Government's flagship for international postgraduate scholars administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. During the 2002-2003 academic year, combined spending on Chevening programs equaled £ 44 million representing a 7.5% increase from the previous year and a total increase of 22.5% since 1999 when Tony Blair introduced the new educational initiative to increase the number of international students studying in the United Kingdom (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2003).

Despite increases in funding for international students, numerous international educators and students from around the globe see a paradox within the international education policy of the United States. The international education community receives frequent messages from the U.S Government and the Administration regarding the value of international education and that by bringing international students and scholars to the United



States to study we contribute to national security and spread democratic principles around the globe. Many practitioners, however, are dismayed by current and strict interpretations of immigration regulations coupled with technological problems with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System or SEVIS and other government databases that cause unwanted set backs or refusals with student visa applications or detainment at the ports-of entry. Some international educators equate U.S. foreign policy and continued troop deployments in Iraq with U.S. international education policy. There is no doubt that since September 11<sup>th</sup>, it has become increasingly difficult for international students from some countries to come to and remain in the United States. Enrollment figures for international students dropped 2.4% in 2003-2004. This was the first decline in international student enrollment figures since 1971-1972 when enrollments dropped by 3%. Chinese student numbers in the U.S. decreased 4.6% from 64,757 students in 2002-2003 to 61,765 students in 2003-2004 (IIE, 2004; ACE, 2004). As a comparison, statistics compiled by the Higher Education Statistics Agency in the United Kingdom reported that the number of non-European Union international students rose 23% during 2002-2003 over the previous year (British Council, 2004). New U.S. security policies such as the Visa Mantis Clearance Procedure (the screening of international students and scholars coming to study in certain academic fields – predominately in the physical and biological sciences) or requiring a mandatory FBI background check of male student visa applicants from 27 predominately Muslim countries has created a hostile environment and difficulty in managing the exchange and inflow of international students.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the Bush Administration was faced with the enormous task of securing our borders and implementing various provisions of the Illegal Immigration Reform & Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 which was signed into law by

President Clinton on September 30, 1996. One of the major provisions of the Act required U.S. colleges and universities to collect and report information to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) on nonimmigrant foreign students. The type of information that was required to be reported was the student's identity and current address in the United States, the nonimmigrant classification of the student and the date the visa under such classification was approved, the current academic status of the student including whether they are maintaining full-time status and any disciplinary action taken against a foreign student as a result of the student being convicted of a crime. By September 11, 2002, the U.S. Government put a temporary web based student data collection system known as the Interim Student and Exchange Authentication System (ISEAS) in place and by February 2003 SEVIS became operational and all international students studying in the United States were required to be entered into this database by August 1, 2003.

U.S. Ambassador to India David Mulford (2004) describes the tremendous effort made by the United States to balance national security efforts in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup> while opening borders to international students, scholars and other visitors as an improvement. In India, for example, the Embassy and Consulates have created additional space for visa interviews and each year they set into motion procedures that facilitate the timely interview of students and scholars so they can arrive in the U.S. for the start of classes. They have also installed new equipment and technologies that has made the entire visa application process more efficient. Mulford reports that in 2004, the Embassy and Consulates in India issued 12% more visas than over the same time period the past two years and the current visa issuance rate for India is higher than pre-September 11<sup>th</sup> rates. On November 10, 2004 the American Council on Education (ACE), the Association of American Universities (AAU), the

Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), the Institute of International Education (IIE), NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) released the findings of their joint survey and reported that, despite the decline in new international student enrollments in fall 2004, visa delays were less widespread than the previous year. The United Kingdom is also making improvements with visa issuance and entry procedures. In 2000, the British government established UKvisas which is a joint effort of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office to manage the United Kingdom's entry clearance procedures. The British National Audit Office reported in 2004 that applications for visas to the United Kingdom in 2002-2003 rose 33% over the past five years to 1.94 million. The National Audit Office found that UKvisas continues to improve its efficiency and provides a high caliber of services to visa applicants despite an increase in applications and changing policies (National Audit Office, 2004).

It is my conclusion that the United States government does support international education and values the contribution international students and scholars make to the United States while they are studying here and, more importantly, when they return home and apply democratic principles they learned in shaping the future of their countries. Current immigration regulations and procedures no doubt deter many international academics from applying to schools in the United States. The United States government is keenly aware of the difficulties international students and scholars have experienced the past three years and has allocated significant resources towards making the process of coming to the U.S. as fair and seamless as possible.

Understanding the international education policies of the United States and the United Kingdom is the first phase in researching international student exposure to democracy while studying abroad and the application of democratic principles upon return to their countries. The next phase, of course, is to investigate international student exposure to democratic practices while studying abroad in the west and to learn what democratic principles are implemented by students upon return to their home countries. Specifically, what areas or themes of democracy (ie. observing the election process or learning about equal rights for the disabled) that international students are exposed to are most influential to international students and how are these democratic ideas put into action upon return to their home countries? Additional research could also focus on the impact that U.S., British and other students from western countries have on democratization in the countries in which they are studying.

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