“Change through Exchange”: Promoting Global Leadership via Academic Exchange

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Abstract:

The Fulbright Program (est. 1946) provided in many regards a model for post-World War II cultural and academic exchange programs. The ideas of citizens as diplomats and people-to-people exchanges were cornerstones of U.S. cultural exchange policies in the 1950s, and mutual understanding, public diplomacy, citizenship, and leadership were among the central concerns of the rapidly developing field of international education.

Exchanges initially were based on the ideas of bilateralism and binationalism, frequently were based on agreements between participating states, and depended heavily on public (US government) funding. In the interim, the role of government funding has diminished substantially in tuition driven educational systems, and international education has become a multibillion dollar industry characterized by global competition for talent and fee-paying students with considerable numbers of students moving as “free agents” outside of exchange agreements or programs. Furthermore, marketability, career planning and résumé-building, rankings, the value of internationally recognized qualifications, the prospects of high returns, and labor market mobility are among the factors that students consider when deciding to study abroad.

In the immediate post-WW II decades, international education was all about citizenship and global leadership; however, in the interim, the structures of the enterprise of international education and the motives underlying it have changed dramatically. Furthermore, the process of globalization has changed study abroad motives, destinations, and student flows, and the advent of the cluster of technologies associated with “cyber culture” have profound implications for how people experience distance and difference of foreign cultures. Where does the (traditional) objective of global leadership fit in to this new mix?