New International Resource Center Supports Indiana’s Interests

Everyday, communities across Indiana come into closer contact with the global economy and culture. Sometimes the change seems minor. Perhaps, a foreign food suddenly gains popularity, or a recent immigrant moves next door. Sometimes, the change seems traumatic. A local factory relocates to Asia, for instance.

To help Indiana residents adjust to this new international context, Indiana University has established the Indiana University International Resource Center (IUIRC). The center was created this January with funding from the Strategic Directions Charter of IU President Myles Brand. The center seeks to match IU’s international resources with the efforts of organizations outside the university that are promoting international commerce and awareness.

The IUIRC serves its broad constituency of businesses, state and local governments, local economic development organizations, and other nonprofit organizations, in three ways.

First, the IUIRC works as a clearinghouse, receiving requests from the community for international assistance and identifying the IU group best able to help. Second, the IUIRC serves as a broker, putting together partnerships between the university and outside organizations to create new program solutions. And, third, the IUIRC develops programs that meet the international needs of Indiana and the Midwest.

The IUIRC has initiated an ambitious series of pilot programs. It is working, for example, with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the IU School of Business’s Global Business Information Network to develop a comprehensive “export market entry package” for small and medium sized manufacturers of machine tools.

Another IUIRC initiative involves working with the Indiana Department of Education and Purdue University to develop an international learning component for a program on Brazil run by the FFA (formerly known as the Future Farmers of America).

IU’s area studies centers are key partners of the IUIRC. Director Shawn Reynolds is working with each center to develop new outreach programs. For example, he is working with the East Asian Studies Center to develop a program for the Bloomington Small Business Development Corp. on Japanese/American communication issues.

For more information, contact Reynolds at (812) 856-5961 or Donna Veach, assistant director, at (812) 856-5507.

Shawn Reynolds is the director of the IU International Resource Center.

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IU Faculty Assist Vietnam With Teacher Education Reform

Four Indiana University School of Education faculty members spent winter break in Vietnam serving as consultants to the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training on the Vietnamese Teacher Education Reform Project. Charles Barman and Natalie Barman from IUPUI and Terrence Mason and Ginette Delandshere from Bloomington spent three weeks talking to government officials and educators about ways to change the educational system in that country.

The system of education in Vietnam is different and more closely resembles the Soviet model than any other. Unlike comprehensive universities in the United States, there are many schools which focus on a single profession or academic discipline. A liberal arts grounding is not so universally stressed. Students do not progress course by course, but year by year. They are not familiar with the U.S. system of taking several individual courses at one time and being graded separately in each one.

They study for a year and then take one major test. If they fail that, they must repeat the entire year’s study. And it is not easy to change career plans.

Mason and his wife, Ginette Delandshere, and the Barmans went to Vietnam together as a team. They visited Hanoi National University and Thai Nguyen University, which is really a cluster of specialized colleges that are now trying out some aspects of the American system.

The Indiana team reviewed the Vietnamese plans for change. One goal of the reform project is to improve the training of teachers. At present, the requirements for becoming a teacher are considerably different than those in the U.S. Some graduate from teacher training institutions in only two years.

The IU educators explained how American universities are organized and discussed curriculum and teaching
works at a major multidisciplinary university in the United States. "There-fore, instead of engaging in curriculum development, we spent most of our time explaining how the credit system works at a major multidisciplinary university in the United States," Charles Barman said. "There-fore, instead of engaging in curriculum development, we spent most of our time explaining how the credit system works at a major multidisciplinary university in the United States." Mason said changes in Vietnam may be difficult and may not always have the desired results, especially in light of the fact that Vietnam is one of the poorest nations in the world.

He cautioned officials against trying to do too much too fast. Superimposing a modern educational system too quickly on that traditional and culturally different nation might cause many problems. In addition to the economic stresses, many educators in Vietnam are familiar and satisfied with the present system and are resisting change. "The leaders in education have a vision of the changes they would like to make in their system, but accomplishing the task will need to involve educators and teachers at all levels," Natalie Barman said.

"At this time they have a shortage of qualified teachers at all levels, especially in the rural areas. At the same time that the country needs to increase the numbers of teachers in the classroom, they also want to begin to raise the standards for teacher qualification. This will be a difficult task."

She believes it will be better for the Vietnamese to adapt the elements of the American system to fit in Vietnam, rather than simply to copy the U.S. model.

Mason was generally pleased with the results of the visit. "I think the Vietnamese did seem to gain some real understanding."

The faculty members hope that the next phase of the project will be to bring some Vietnamese educators to IU. They invite communication from others in the IU community who are interested in Vietnam. Mason urged them to contact the dean's office in the School of Education.

Charles Barman is director of teacher education at IUPUI. Natalie Barman is a part-time lecturer there and a fifth-grade science teacher at Park Tudor School in Indianapolis. Mason and Delandshere both teach on the Bloomington campus. Their venture grew out of a trip that Donald Warren, dean of the School of Education at IU, took to Vietnam last May. Warren was keynote speaker at a conference on higher education reform, but he soon realized that the Vietnamese wanted and needed more than a speech and a conference. He pledged IU's assistance in their efforts to change.

— Susan Voelkel
IU Home Pages

Inner Asian & Uralic National Resource Center Workshop

The Inner Asian & Uralic National Resource Center hosted a workshop on "Opening Doors to Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Keys to Successful Academic Exchanges." The April 4-6 program was the first in the 1997 Country/Culture Workshop Series funded by the United States Information Agency and sponsored by NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

Thirty registered participants interested in building or strengthening exchange programs with Central Asia and the southern Caucasus attended the workshop. The workshop was also attended by panelists and representatives of the embassies of Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, and the Armenian Institute of Oriental Studies.

Workshop presenters included representatives of organizations that administer academic exchanges (USIA, IREX and ACTR/ACCELS) and university faculty and administrators with expertise and experience in Central Asia and the southern Caucasus.

One panel included students from the region who shared their thoughts on issues that must be considered in student and scholar exchanges. Other panels were devoted to an overview of the history and contemporary problems of Central Asia and the southern Caucasus, with a special focus on the educational system, and the problems of administering exchange programs (including student selection, cultural differences, funding concerns, admissions policies, and housing).

A particularly popular event associated with the workshop was the Nawruz festival organized by the IU Kazakhstan Student Association. The Friday evening celebration drew nearly 300 people to the IMU Frangipani Room for cultural presentations, live music and dance, and authentic cuisine.

Nawruz is a spring festival celebrated widely among many peoples in Central Asia and the Middle East. Normally observed at the spring equinox, Nawruz represents the beginning of a new life cycle.

— Scott Feickert
LAUNRC

William Fierman, director-designate of the Inner Asian and Uralic National Resource Center, chats with Rick Swanson of IREX.