NAFSA Workshop at IU Looks beyond Asian Economic Crisis

In the fast-paced world of international finance, investors may speak of the Asian crisis in the past tense, but colleges and universities are still watching the impacts of the devastating epidemic of economic crises three years ago. In June, educators and administrators in foreign student affairs—recruiters, admissions officers, advisors, faculty—gathered in Bloomington for a workshop to discuss how recent developments in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries will affect student flows to the United States and other nations.

"The workshop was a wonderful opportunity for us to look beyond the immediacy of the recent economic crisis, to examine the short-term effects, but really to concentrate on the longer-term opportunities and challenges," said Chris Powers, director of sponsored training and scholarship programs at NAFSA: Association for International Educators.

Thirty-eight participants from across the United States and abroad attended the June 23–25 workshop, entitled "Southeast Asia, Economic Pressures, and International Student Flows," a NAFSA country/culture workshop sponsored by the Educational Information and Resources Branch of the United States Department of State and hosted by Indiana University Bloomington. The workshop was intended to help participants predict numbers and makeup of the Southeast Asian student body in years to come, given the sharp declines witnessed recently.

Malaysian, Thai, and Indonesian student enrollment in U.S. universities fell last year by about 21, 17, and 9 percent from 1998, respectively, according to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors census for 1998–99. Students from these three countries have traditionally made up the bulk of the Southeast Asian student population on U.S. campuses.

"I was most pleased with the fact that we had prominent educators and administrators from these countries," said workshop chair Tim Diemer, the director of administration at the Office of International Services of Purdue School of Engineering and Technology, IUPUI. "We had strong representation from Thai, Malaysian, and Indonesian educators who offered up-to-date perspectives on recent trends in the region."

One such administrator was Indonesian national Jionardi Hindrawan, the assistant vice provost for international education and director of international enrollment management at SUNY—Buffalo. Hindrawan spoke about current trends and developments affecting higher education in Indonesia today. "Despite the current economic crisis and political instability in Indonesia, there still remains a good market of academically and financially qualified Indonesian students," said Hindrawan. "The challenge for U.S. institutions of higher education," he concluded, "is to develop recruitment strategies targeted to Indonesian students both in and outside of Indonesia."

Other prominent Southeast Asian presenters included Bhimolvan Pongsawadi, minister counselor for the Royal Thai Embassy in Washington; Siti Shariah Hj. Shaari, the director of the Embassy of Malaysia's students department; and the well-known Thai economist Wiwatchai Atthakor.

Topics ranged from applying enrollment management concepts and practices to international students—presented by Donald Hossler, Indiana University's vice chancellor for enrollment services—to virtual recruiting and the use of information technology, to multimedia recruiting and distance education. Patricia Biddinger, director of international student recruitment and policy retention at IUPUI, spoke about Vietnam in the session on current issues in educational policy and the changing face of higher education in Southeast Asia.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of the workshop was the use of a specially created workshop Web site. Initially used to publicize the event and to encourage participation, the site became an essential educational tool during the workshop. Because the program sessions were held in IU's Wright Education Building, a campus showcase for state-of-the-art instructional technology since the early '90s, participants had constant access to computers and the Web, and presenters were able to incorporate electronic information seamlessly into their presentations. But even in the wake of the workshop, the Web site will

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remain available as a resource to participants and non-participants alike, carrying program presentations, notes, and new links at www.iupui.edu/~csea/nafsa2000/.

Diemer was especially pleased with the technological innovations of the workshop programs. "I had a concept in mind for an interactive workshop that would take advantage of new media," he said. "I definitely didn't want to have a traditional conference with a lot of paper. I wanted it paperless, and it was successful.”

This “paperless” aspect of the workshop drew an overwhelmingly positive response from participants. "After this workshop, I find I have much more info than I even got at the event itself,” wrote Lu Lyons of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. “The statistics, trends and other information presented at a workshop and on a Web site such as yours really helps to give us all a more accurate idea of what the real situation is now, and what the realistic possibilities are for the future.

This is the most valuable information we can ask for, and the most practically useful.”

Participants, organizers, and presenters alike agreed that the workshop was a resounding success.

The [workshop] was timely and the participants were well-qualified,” said Diemer. “All in all, we built it, and they came, and it worked.”

—Natasha Hunter
Office of International Services
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At the Overseas Study Information Center, OVST's Sandra Hall (left) shows students where to look for information.

deadlines, provide news from home, and generally make them feel connected to IU. When the students get ready to return home, Weting and her staff again provide assistance with finding financial aid, locating housing, and other matters.

Another initiative of the office within the last decade has been the creation of competitive scholarship programs that encourage students to consider the feasibility of an experience abroad. OVST funds three different programs, the Regional Campus Scholarships for students from IUPUI and other IU campuses; the Minority Scholarships for minority students from all IU campuses; and the Overseas Study Scholarships for degree candidates on academic year and language-based programs. Partner agencies such as CIEE and IES (see sidebar, p. 7) with which IU offers co-sponsored programs also have scholarships available to IU students. In fact, IU has been a top beneficiary among participating institutions in receiving these scholarships for its students. This past year, more than 25 percent of IU students got some form of financial assistance (over and above other forms of aid from, for example, IU's Office of Student Financial Assistance). Libby DeVoe, OVST's associate director for administration, says that "IU is a national model and a trendsetter for offering financial support to students on overseas programs.”

It is clear that IU's study abroad programs will continue to grow and diversify. Stryker points out that it is the university's policy, reiterated annually by mailings from President Myles Brand's office, that proposals for all programs of overseas activity must be reviewed by the university-wide Overseas Study Advisory Council. This applies whether the proposals are for programs open to all IU students, for single courses designed for individual schools or campuses, or for those offered on a noncredit basis. The council has developed guidelines for proposals, in which the major criteria to be applied are academic quality, cultural enrichment, impact on existing programs, administrative efficiency, financial solvency, and student health and safety.

For further information, refer to OVST's Web site: www.indiana.edu/~overseas/, or contact the staff at Office of Overseas Study, Franklin Hall 303, Bloomington IN 47405; phone: (812) 855-9304; fax: (812) 855-6452; e-mail: overseas@indiana.edu.

—RMN