IU Reaffirms Thailand Connections and Importance of Recruitment

Patrick O’Meara, IU’s dean for international programs, is heartened by the historical ties that bind Indiana University to its international alumni and to the institutions abroad that it has helped to build. One of these is Thailand’s National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), which celebrated its 50th anniversary in July 2005 with a one-day conference. Roger Schmenner, associate dean of the Kelley School of Business on the Indianapolis campus, represented IU at the ceremony.

To recognize IU’s vital role in its creation, NIDA earlier presented an honorary doctorate to O’Meara in January 2005 and published his article, “A Short History of the IU-NIDA Partnership,” in the conference proceedings. Here he describes his trip to Thailand, where he was impressed with the many accomplishments of IU’s Thai alumni and their continued support of the university. He calls for more vigorous action to attract international students to IU, despite post–9/11 requirements, competition from elsewhere, and declining international enrollments nationwide.

Early in January, I traveled to Thailand to receive an honorary doctorate from the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). In many ways, the degree, which was conferred by Princess Mala Chakri Sirindhorn, the daughter of King Bhumibol Adulyadej, was in recognition of Indiana University’s decades-long relationship with NIDA.

Fifty years ago, on May 3, 1955, IU agreed to assist the Thai government in establishing the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) at Thammasat University in Bangkok, the precursor of NIDA. The project had major funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The contract was signed in Washington, D.C. by IU President Herman B Wells and by Thailand’s Prime Minister P. Pibulsonggram, rector of Thammasat University, who was in the United States on an official visit at the invitation of President Dwight Eisenhower.

From the earliest days of his presidency, Wells had always had a

continued on page 36

International Services’ Efforts to Improve Access to Higher Education

In April 2005, Indiana University’s Office of International Services (OIS) co-hosted a symposium with the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) and the national organization NAFSA: Association of International Educators. Entitled In America’s Interest: Welcoming International Students—The Role of Higher Education, the symposium explored the national implications of a 2003 report published by the NAFSA Strategic Task Force on International Student Access that addressed the current difficulties international students experience in pursuing higher education in the United States.

The 80 participants were top administrators and key staff from CIC institutions (comprising the major Midwestern universities) who are involved in attracting and welcoming international students. They work in admissions offices, graduate and undergraduate programs, international offices, intensive English programs, financial aid offices, student services units, and alumni associations. They brainstormed how to work more actively and collaboratively within and beyond their institutions to promote international diversity on their campuses.

In the evening’s opening dinner, the group heard introductory remarks presented by IU’s Don Hossler, associate vice president for academic affairs for enrollment

continued on page 26
global perspective, traveling widely, exploring ways that the university could assist other nations and institutions, welcoming international visitors to the campus, and interacting frequently with students from different parts of the world. In his autobiography, *Being Lucky* (Indiana University Press, 1987), Wells describes going to Thailand on various occasions to encourage those working on the IPA project. In the IU Archives, there are numerous photographs of Wells with students and dignitaries from Thailand, which he thought was “one of the most interesting countries in the world.”

Accompanying me on this trip to Bangkok were my colleagues, Associate Deans Susan Sutton of the Office of International Affairs at IUPUI, and Christopher Viers of the Office of International Services, as well as David Jones, director of IU’s Center on Southeast Asia. They were impressed with NIDA’s enormous impact on the country. Today, it is one of Thailand’s leading institutions of higher education, and its graduates hold key administrative positions throughout the country. In addition to the collaboration with NIDA, which brought many Thai graduate students, faculty, and administrators to IU for training and advanced degrees, IU has also had long-standing linkages with other Thai institutions such as Chulalongkorn University, which also received us warmly with a reception hosted by the School of Sports Science. IU’s Schools of Nursing and Dentistry also have long-standing connections with Thailand.

One of the most remarkable aspects of our recent trip was the interest and enthusiasm of our Thai IU alumni. We had hesitated about traveling to Thailand so soon after the devastation of the tsunami, but everyone we met there was determined to continue on with daily life. On short notice, the alums organized a splendid reception for more than 150 people. The goodwill and nostalgia for IU was palpable and overwhelming. The reception included invitations to students and their parents who had applied for admission for the fall semester 2005. The interaction between these students, the alums, and some of our current students who were home for the recess, added powerfully to our efforts to interest these prospective Thai students.

For our part, we organized a luncheon for major donors and again, this too was a notable event. We also had the opportunity to meet with officials of the U.S. Embassy, the Fulbright Commission, and the Institute for International Education to talk about recruiting students to Indiana University. We also spoke with representatives of the Thai Civil Service Commission.

What is the central lesson to be learned from our contact with our Thai alums? It is evident that our international alumni are loyal and caring members of the larger IU family. I have personally been welcomed enthusiastically by alumni in Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Yet, we now face a time of uncertainty. Our meetings in Bangkok indicated that IU is facing severe competition from Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom as well as other U.S. universities. Post 9/11 requirements put in place by Homeland Security and the SEVIS system have also created the unintended impression that the United States is less welcoming than before.

The current climate requires a much more direct, vigilant, and visible plan of action if we are to continue attracting international students to our campuses. The Asian countries have traditionally been the major countries sending international students to the U.S. and elsewhere. Over the past two years, IU as a whole has seen a significant decline in applications and enrollment from these countries, reflecting a pattern felt nationwide. Many U.S. universities are now directly and vigorously addressing the problem.

IU President Adam W. Herbert, in testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last October, summed up the situation: What is happening at Indiana University is happening at colleges and universities throughout the United States. Many intellectual and cultural ties that cross borders and unite peoples are being severed. Stemming the flow of international students and scholars who want to participate in our academic life also stems the free flow of knowledge and ideas. This is a moment for decisive action. We must return the United States to its preeminence in international education.

Indiana University is now seriously assessing the situation and considering ways of remedying the decline in our international student population. Representatives from the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok and other agencies indicated that many Thai students feel that they might no longer be welcome in the United States or that the visa process was too formidable. In fact, we were
Liberia continued from page 8

E. Lingle Craig Preservation Laboratory, as well as the Liberian Presidential Archives, Center for National Documents and Records/National Archives–Liberia, and the University of Liberia. In late April, IU’s links to Liberia were further strengthened by the signing of an agreement of friendship and cooperation with the University of Liberia. The signatories were Patrick O’Meara, dean for international programs signing on behalf of IU President Adam W. Herbert, and University of Liberia President Al-Hassan Conteh. Accompanying the president was Sedia Massaquoi-Bangoura, senior program coordinator of the University of Liberia.

The linkage represents a new phase for the Liberian university, which underwent extensive damage, looting, and faculty brain drain due to the long-lasting civil war. With the advent of a negotiated peace for Liberia in 2003, Conteh and his administration have been working to resume the kind of academic programming and professional training essential for the reconstruction of the country. O’Meara says that the agreement will facilitate the exchange of teaching, research, personnel, and students, as well as books, and he looks forward to very productive relationship with the Liberian university.

—RMN

Thailand Connections continued from previous page

assured by the U.S. Embassy that, contrary to perception, 80 percent of applicants do indeed get their visas, even though the process might now take six weeks. Of course, there must be recruitment efforts by departments, schools, and the university as a whole. At the same time, we must also allocate resources to nurturing our international alums. Most recently, IU alumni clubs in 19 countries in Asia, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, India, and Latin America eagerly agreed to host events for prospective students and their parents.

International students have contributed enormously to the diversity and quality of our university and to the economic well-being of our state. I hope that their special presence will grow rather than decline. Herman Wells, in being at the founding of important Thai institutions such as NIDA, profoundly understood the essence of the contribution of international students and international knowledge to the intellectual stature of Indiana University. We need to ensure that his great legacy continues to flourish.

—IU Home Pages
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