

Think Beyond the Money:
Lessons from the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund

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Abstract: The internationalization of higher education is certainly not a new development in Cuba or the Americas. Cuba, for example, has a long history of participation in the internationalization of higher education.¹ What the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund seeks that is perhaps new, in addition to ultimately supporting the Western Hemisphere's prosperity, is the establishment of long-term partnerships between institutions of higher education. This paper will discuss some successful examples that will hopefully inspire you to think about international education in a new way. The Innovation Fund's focus on partnership encourages us to "think beyond the money," with the goal of incentivizing higher education institutions to embed student mobility into the culture, curriculum, and future of an institution. The best way to increase student mobility is to first address the institutional, curricular, and cultural barriers that hinder study abroad. Funding for travel and program costs is necessary, but must be wisely leveraged to create sustainable change. Our innovation grants are a step toward that sustainable change.

On behalf of Partners in the Americas (Partners), the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and NAFSA: Association of International Educators, we are very happy to be part of this academic meeting in Cienfuegos, Cuba, and to introduce you to President Barack Obama's *100,000 Strong in the Americas* initiative (100,000 Strong Americas). 100,000 Strong in the Americas is the Obama Administration's signature education initiative in the Western Hemisphere designed to foster region-wide prosperity through the greater international exchange of students.

¹ Hernández Pérez, R. (2005). "Internationalization of Higher Education in Cuba," *Higher Education in Latin America: The International Dimension*, ed. Hans de Wit and Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, p. 211-238.

The future of the people and nations of the Americas is inextricably linked. *100,000 Strong in the Americas* was created to deepen relationships across the Western Hemisphere that enable young people to explore the Americas, understand our shared values and various cultures, and lead the process of greater economic and social integration that will provide for increased security and prosperity.

The goal of 100,000 Strong Americas is to foster region-wide cooperation, understanding, and prosperity through the greater international exchange of students. Increasing mutual understanding and building closer people-to-people ties helps the people of the Western Hemisphere address common challenges, including citizen security, economic opportunity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

In support of the goal of achieving 100,000 students studying abroad annually in each direction by 2020, the White House, Partners of the Americas (Partners), NAFSA: Association of International Educators, and the U.S. Department of State (DOS) are working together to increase opportunities for academic mobility between the United States and the countries of the Western Hemisphere through the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund. This dynamic public-private partnership seeks to leverage modest public investment and private sector donations in a cost-effective manner to innovate and bring the initiative to the necessary scale.

There are approximately 45,000 U.S. students studying annually in Latin America and the Caribbean and 72,000 Latin American and Caribbean students studying annually in the United States each year.² Canada contributes an additional 28,000 students studying in the United States, while 1,400 U.S. students are studying in Canada. We are seeking to nearly double the number of students studying abroad in our region in less than ten years. To reach our goal, we will need to address the systemic challenges that keep students from studying abroad. For example, many Latin American and Caribbean students do not have the English language skills or resources to succeed at U.S. institutions. Conversely, many U.S. students are unaware of the opportunities available in the hemisphere, and U.S. colleges and universities face challenges integrating study abroad into degree programs, designing programs for nontraditional students, and developing cost-effective opportunities for all students. The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund is designed to give higher education institutions the power to address these and other issues. To reach our goal, it is imperative that colleges and universities make study abroad accessible for all students, regardless of their major, socio-economic status, or the type of institution in which they are enrolled.

The Wholesale Approach

The 100,000 Strong Americas Innovation Fund makes “innovation grants” to institutions of higher education to create study abroad opportunities involving students

² Farrugia, C.A., & Bhandari, R. (2014). *Open Doors 2014 Report on Internationalization Educational Exchange*. New York: Insitute of International Education.

from the United States, as well as from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada. International exchange is rooted in a partnership between a U.S. and a non-US institution of higher learning. In this context, students study and move to and from the U.S. There is a study abroad deficit in the Western Hemisphere, and our solution is to adopt “the wholesale approach” by working directly with institutions that seek to establish innovative programs for study abroad. Our “wholesale approach” aims to remove traditional institutional barriers that prevent a variety of students and faculty from developing unique partnerships and programs across American borders.

Many scholarship programs already exist: for U.S. students, the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program and the Fulbright U.S. Student Program fellowships support study and teaching abroad and are a centerpiece of U.S. educational diplomacy. For foreign students, EducationUSA and the Fulbright Foreign Student Program support graduate students and young professionals. Many companies and charities throughout the region also fund scholarship programs. And recently, governments in Brazil, Mexico, and Ecuador have made investments in study-abroad scholarship programs.

Yet as high quality and important as these scholarship programs are, they reward relatively few, especially in contrast to our goal of a minimum of 200,000 total students each year traveling north and south. 2,300 Gilman scholarships will be awarded this year to U.S. students for study abroad globally, and 8,000 Fulbright awards, about 2,800 of which are targeted to U.S. students and scholars. Even if half of these major scholarship programs went to the Western Hemisphere – which overstates the current distribution weighted toward Europe and Asia – they would only contribute a few thousand students.

Given our limited funding, but organizational advantages, the question became: how can we leverage more resources to support and encourage many more students? We agreed that 100,000 Strong in the Americas’ strategy should focus not on the “retail” approach (individual student scholarships), but on a “wholesale” approach that incentivized institutional change. We could challenge – and offer incentives – to institutions of higher education to form robust and enduring public-private partnerships to address the various structural and systemic barriers as networks of institutions.

We believe that the innovation approach has the power to change the status quo. Our funds enable institutions to do the hard work involved in identifying new partners in the educational, corporate, and private communities, identifying their own strengths and weaknesses, and developing and testing new ideas with the potential to transform the way they build partnerships in the Western Hemisphere.

Why Cuba and the U.S. Should Think Beyond the Money

The internationalization of higher education is certainly not a new development in Cuba or the Americas. Cuba, for example, has a long history of participation in the

internationalization of higher education.³ What the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund seeks that is perhaps new, in addition to ultimately supporting the Western Hemisphere's prosperity, is the establishment of long-term partnerships between institutions of higher education. The second part of this paper will discuss some successful examples that will hopefully inspire Cuban and U.S. HEIs to think about international education in a new way. The Innovation Fund's focus on partnership mainly encourages us to "think beyond the money," with the goal of incentivizing higher education institutions to embed student mobility into the culture, curriculum, and future of an institution. The best way to increase student mobility is to first address the institutional, curricular, and cultural barriers that hinder study abroad. Funding for travel and program costs is necessary, but must be wisely leveraged to create sustainable change. Our innovation grants are a step toward that sustainable change.

Building Bridges, Creating Global Citizens, All with Modest Resources

100,000 Strong in the Americas aims to build bridges, establish exchange, and build trust among all of our American nations. Institutions worldwide are focusing on internationalization, wishing to increase student mobility and international research collaboration. However, "academic collaboration with Latin America ranked [only] as the fourth priority, followed by Africa and then the Middle East," according to a recent worldwide survey on internationalization conducted by the International Association of Universities.⁴ We can expect limited funding as a major internal and external obstacle, which has consequently permitted mostly students with financial resources to participate in study abroad in the last decades. Furthermore, dependence only upon government funding is unwise, both because the private sector – the major beneficiary of a better-prepared workforce – is left out, and because government budgets can be volatile. The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund hopes to change this by not only strengthening academic collaboration between the U.S. and the countries of the Western Hemisphere, but also by leveling the playing field for students. Our goal is to help students from diverse and less privileged backgrounds engage in study abroad, increase their future employability, become "global citizens," and have access to international professional opportunities that would otherwise be very difficult for them.

By building bridges, reestablishing exchange, and rebuilding trust, the Innovation Fund also seeks to sustain regional common ground, create professional talent, and strengthen our people-to-people links in the Western Hemisphere. Freedom in research and education helps maintain democracy, equality, peace, and good governance, and it is our belief—as aptly stated by President Barack Obama in 2013—that "when we study together, we learn together, we work together, and we prosper together."⁵ Our partners in the private sector understand this, helping us advance the education of our future

³ Hernández Pérez, R. (2015). "Internationalization of Higher Education in Cuba," *Higher Education in Latin America: The International Dimension*, ed. Hans de Wit and Isabel Cristina Jaramillo, p. 211-238.

⁴ Knight, J. (2015). "The Lure of Europe for International Higher Education Cooperation," *International Higher Education* 48, p. 5.

⁵ President Obama, 3 May 2013, Mexico City, Mexico.

experts and global professionals to support entrepreneurship and develop skills in high-priority workforce sectors. The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund is a natural partner, building bridges between private donors and higher education institutions that strengthen entrepreneurship in the Western Hemisphere. Our partnerships contribute to the advancement of specific research or fields of study and help prepare our future workforce, as exemplified in some of the cases discussed further below. In short, the public-private partnership aims to support the development of experienced students who will be able to navigate the professional world with global and cultural awareness and expertise. Here we recognize some of our partners and donors by name:

- Santander Bank and Santander Universities
- ExxonMobil Foundation
- CAF – Development Bank of Latin America
- Campus Puerto Rico
- Coca-Cola Foundation
- Freeport-McMoran Copper and Gold Foundation
- SENA: Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, Colombia
- The Ford Foundation

Since 2014 100,000 Strong in the Americas has completed six (6) rounds of innovation funding, with 48 grants awarded to 110 higher education institutions from 16 countries in the Americas. Three additional rounds of grants will be awarded during 2015. Grant winners include partnerships with Cuba, Mexico, Jamaica, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica, among others. In 2016 and 2017 we will be reviewing a minimum of 11 more rounds. Please join our online Innovation Network to receive the latest updates and to interact with other higher education partners by visiting <http://www.100KStrongAmericas.org/educate>. Through our grant competition we aim to drive institutional innovation that recent partnerships have accomplished in areas including but not limited to the following:

- Inventive tuition leveraging and swapping
- Faculty-led exchanges building institutional capacity
- Academe and industry blending building global professional competencies
- Underrepresented student program development
- Faculty-led courses and curriculum development
- Summer research and language proficiency
- Overcoming insecurity perceptions
- International mentoring and advising
- Bidirectional corporate internship programs
- Agriculture and biological sciences collaboration
- Multidisciplinary research
- Innovative learning abroad programs, including service learning and internships

To reiterate, we work with institutions that demonstrate promising innovation and the participation of a diverse student body in international education. We will be discussing some successful examples, as promised, further below. As grant providers, we consider proposals from a variety of universities, community colleges, technical institutes, and professional programs in order to encompass the greatest diversity of higher education. We frequently help fund shorter terms abroad that are able to accommodate non-traditional students who may have specific time restrictions due to work or family obligations.

Changing the Campus, Changing the Culture

An important starting point toward generating more equity in the internationalization of higher education is changing the campus and changing the culture. Creating institutional capacity, involving faculty, and focusing on mutually beneficial programs of study can begin to overcome the institutional, curricular, and cultural barriers that hinder many possible opportunities to study abroad.

The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund builds on this theory of change and exchange, initially promoted by the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program and the NAFSA Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad.

As the Lincoln Commission wrote, “The point is so fundamental that it bears repeating. In global affairs – whether the region is Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, or the Middle East, whether the issue involves diplomacy, foreign affairs, national security, or commerce and finance – what nations do not know exacts a heavy toll. The stakes involved in study abroad are that simple, that straightforward, and that important. For their own future and that of the nation, it is essential that college graduates today become globally competent.”⁶

The Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad emphasized that this was not a proposal for U.S. federal government action in isolation: “We use the term ‘national effort,’ rather than ‘federal program,’ advisedly. Although the federal role is crucial, the states, the private sector, higher education institutions, and state and regional accrediting bodies must all step up to the plate and do their part to promote study abroad.”⁷ The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund is the perfect

⁶ Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005). *Global Competence and National Needs: One Million Americans Studying Abroad*. Washington, D.C., p. 3. “The fact that the Administration and Congress appointed this bi-partisan commission to recommend a national program to greatly increase the number of Americans studying abroad, particularly in diverse locations, demonstrates the priority our government has given to Americans becoming better educated about the rest of the world.” Marlene M. Johnson, Executive Director, NAFSA: Association of International Educators.” <http://www.nafsa.org/Content.aspx?id=6665>

⁷ NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Report of the Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad (2003). *Securing America’s Future: Global Education for a Global Age*. Washington, D.C., p. iv. http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA_Home/Resource_Library_Assets/Public_Policy/securing_america_s_f

mechanism to catalyze that national effort to increase exchange within the Western Hemisphere, bringing the peoples of the Americas closer together and increasing prosperity in the region. Furthermore, long-term educational partnership developed by Partners of the Americas between the U.S. and Latin America provide living proof of the power of carefully-constructed, deep international educational partnerships with strong value propositions for all institutions involved.

The Innovation Fund especially seeks to support key areas to ensure the longevity of international education and exchange in campuses across the Americas:

First, we support institutional changes leading to sustainable programs. Barriers to increased student mobility exist at every institution, and can include rigid housing or residency requirements, restrictive financial aid policies, or lack of student or faculty support systems. Northampton Community College's proposal with the Universidad Nacional de Trujillo (Perú) and Northwestern University in partnership with the Universidad de Las Artes, here in Cuba, are two examples of institutions using the Innovation Fund to develop faculty support systems to strengthen international programming and sustainably increase student mobility.

Northampton Community College and the Universidad Nacional de Trujillo of Peru are particularly working together to implement sustainable energy systems in developing communities. Their specific goal was to create a short-term summer session centered on service learning in wind energy. But their bigger accomplishment was to create the institutional structures and support systems to train faculty to propose, develop, and lead study abroad programs. 100,000 Strong funds helped the program take a much-needed step back and focus on fundamentals such as streamlining requirements, codifying policies, beefing up evaluation systems, and making it easier for faculty to propose new study abroad courses. As one of our partner associations contends, "These kinds of improvements can do much to clear the way for study abroad to grow and flourish, with staff and overhead resources put to the best use."⁸

Northwestern University and the Universidad de Las Artes in Cuba partnered to strengthen institutional capacity and sustainability, first through faculty engagement and then seeking student support for continuation beyond the first years. Eight (8) Northwestern U.S.-based faculty members visited the study abroad site in Cuba, and three (3) Cuban scholars traveled to Northwestern University to continue their conversations and meet with students interested in study abroad in Cuba. The academic exchange that takes place during the summer includes the study of "Public Health in Cuba" and "Cuba: Culture and Society."

uture.pdf An excellent example of the role of multiple stakeholders in promoting study abroad is Campus Puerto Rico. <http://www.campuspuertorico.pr.gov>

⁸ NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2015), *100,000 Strong in the Americas: Developing a Winning Proposal for an Innovation Grant*.

http://www.nafsa.org/Explore_International_Education/Advocacy_And_Public_Policy/Study_Abroad/100,000_Strong_in_the_Americas_Developing_a_Winning_Proposal_for_an_Innovation_Grant/

Faculty engagement in both countries is expected to improve advising and support for international study. In addition, returning students serve as “ambassadors” to help foster study abroad interest in Cuba and the U.S. Northwestern’s fundraising efforts, in addition to the Innovation Grant, aim to support the travel of students with demonstrated financial need and therefore diversify the study-abroad student profile. As Professor Joel del Río at the Universidad de las Artes states, “The strategy should be based on trust, on valuing your partner, on trying to leave all prejudices behind [...] I believe that we’re seeing for Cuba, and the United States in general, the beginning of a new period in their relationship, in all senses.”⁹ The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund shares this belief, as true student learning tends to happen when study is experiential and interconnected.

Second, we support the advancing of internationalization through the curriculum. In many degree programs it can be hard for a student to study abroad without losing time to degree. However, institutions are finding ways to integrate study abroad into the curriculum in order to allow students to gain international experience while still graduating on time. The University of Arizona’s new International Sustainable Resources Development Certificate and the Universidad de San Andrés’s new academic track in Latin American Studies both successfully integrate student mobility into new academic programs. The University of Arizona’s partnership with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Perú in Lima and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile in Santiago focuses on the delivery of a certificate for participating students interested in careers in natural resource management, particularly mineral resources, water, agriculture, and health. This program helps students in STEM fields, who usually have rigid academic schedules precluding study abroad, become part of the bilingual workforce pool for companies with interests in both Latin America and the U.S.

The Universidad de San Andrés’s new academic track in Latin American Studies particularly expands and internationalizes its curriculum by focusing on service learning and community engagement. The university’s Program in Latin American Studies aims to make the service-learning track a lever to promote the growth of the Program in Latin American Studies overall. The three areas of service learning are social, cultural, and corporate. All include extensive use of case studies from the Argentine context, such as exploring the theme of social change in Argentina. Argentine students going to the U.S. take an approved academic course in a service-learning project, after completing the Argentine course on Social Change, for example, in order to make comparative and transnational connections. We agree with our partners that expanding student participation in the three areas of service learning – social, cultural, and corporate – enhances professional development and fosters civic responsibility by exposing students to the theories, best practices, and challenges of community assistance and service learning.

And third, we facilitate mobility with distance learning. Technology and online learning have the capacity to enhance study abroad programs and create opportunities for new models. Northern Arizona University and the Universidad Nacional de

⁹ Partners of the Americas, YouTube interview (2015). <http://youtu.be/tfHYvYa-bRk>

Tucumán's joint virtual class with an embedded bidirectional study abroad program and West Virginia University and the Universidad Nacional de Asunción's use of the "WeSpeke" media platform to develop relationships between students before their study abroad experience highlight two opportunities to use online tools that enhance international exchange. In the case of Northern Arizona University and the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, distance learning engages in the study of geology and policy, focusing on the management of energy resources in the Americas. In addition to week-long field courses in both Arizona and northern Argentina, students meet virtually to discuss issues raised in the first place of field work, then preparing in advance for issues connected to the next partner country. This type of international exchange is also a model for the broader STEM internationalization initiative in Latin America today.

West Virginia University and the Universidad Nacional de Asunción in Paraguay partnered to foster wider regional interaction, increasing study abroad through a corporate sponsor's virtual media platform. The virtual program called "WeSpeke" links students beyond their own borders and provides the means for intercultural interactions. "WeSpeke" not only connects students, but its successful use, the creators and users argue, will create demand for further study abroad and underscore student mobility between the U.S. and Latin America. This media platform hosts activities related to customized seminars in resource economics, energy, and agriculture, as well as field work in both countries. The distance learning that "WeSpeke" brings together includes a multidisciplinary approach to engineering and economics, as the particular partnership between West Virginia University and the Universidad Nacional de Asunción mainly focuses on resource economics, agriculture, and the environment. The partnership between both universities is also in the process of testing programs in medical/clinical training, tropical medicine training, and the performing arts.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

We hope to have clearly established in this presentation that the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund is an important tool to connect higher education institutions throughout the Americas and to encourage collaboration toward a goal of increasing student mobility and greater understanding and prosperity. Building long-term relationships to remove the institutional, curricular, and cultural barriers that keep students from studying abroad is the best way to increase those opportunities for students. Our partnerships in higher education will contribute to the prosperity of our region by building new bridges, reestablishing trust, supporting common ground, and creating new talent. We look forward to future collaborations.

It is all of our interest to take advantage of the excitement felt by our students and faculty to move forward with these collaborations now. Please contact us if you wish to express your interest.

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