

**Testimony of Philip O. Geier, Ph.D.
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**House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight
and
Labor's Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and
Competitiveness**

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INTRODUCTION

It is an honor for me to bring testimony to Congress regarding international students and scholars: trends, barriers and implications for American universities and U.S. foreign policy. I commend Congress on its interest in increasing the number and diversity of foreign students who come to study in the U.S., particularly at the undergraduate level, as I am convinced that this is an essential and effective dimension of foreign policy which has been underrated and underutilized.

Let me be clear at the outset that my testimony is biased. Biased by a career in international education. Biased by having been the recipient of two Fulbright awards, by having served on the Board of Directors of the Fulbright Association (and as its President for two years). Biased by having spent twelve years in top positions at World Learning Inc. (formerly known as The Experiment in International Living) and another twelve years as President of the United World College-USA. Biased by having spent my entire professional life in the private sector, devoting a great deal of effort fundraising for international organizations and programs. Biased because I have had the privilege of designing and now implementing a major international scholarship program for undergraduates -- the Davis United World College Scholars Program. Amazingly, this program is the vision of and funded entirely by one American philanthropist, Shelby M.C. Davis, who intends to invest a billion dollars or more in this program.

My submission will only briefly address the trends and barriers of international education since that information is well-researched and documented by such highly regarded institutions as the Institute of International Educators (IIE) and NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The heart of my testimony will focus on the purposes, characteristics and achievements of the Davis United World College Scholars Program with hopes that this might inform the Congress about a model in the private sector as it considers a significant increase in the numbers and diversity of international students coming to study at undergraduate institutions in the U.S. I will conclude with a few recommendations.

TRENDS AND BARRIERS

IIE has for 56 years been providing data on international students and scholars and annually publishes “Open Doors” with support from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. IIE’s 2006 edition of “Open Doors” and the research of NAFSA provide dependable data, including the following relevant highlights:

-total international student enrollment in the U.S. of something in excess of 550,000 has remained virtually flat over the past two years after several years of decline following 9/11, but it is heartening that **new** international student enrollment has been increasing over the past two years. This is causing a turn-around in total student enrollment. A recent IIE survey found that 45% of reporting institutions saw increases this year while only 26 % reported declines (compared to last year when 34% reported increases and 33% reported declines). Even more positively, the IIE survey found 52% reporting increases in new student enrollments and only 20% reporting declines (compared to last year’s figures of 40% increasing and 26% decreasing).

-historical funding for international students comes largely (essentially two-thirds at present) from students’ personal and family resources, with the U.S. government accounting for only .4% of total funding.

In light of the data, it is worth asking ourselves whether this turn-around is satisfactory or whether the U.S. government should become more involved somehow in our country gaining a greater share of the growing international student market. Industry data suggests that competitors (other nations) see opportunity and are seizing that opportunity to increase their market shares. Is it time to reinvent our government’s posture in international education? One model to examine in the private sector is the Davis United World College Scholars Program, which began with 42 undergraduate scholars in the class of 2004 at five pilot schools, has grown this past academic year to over 1,100 current undergraduate scholars from 126 countries at 76 institutions, and is continuing to grow. This suggests that significant growth in both numbers and diversity is achievable.

Before leaving the “trends” behind, it is worth noting two other fine sources of information:

-Highlights of a GAO Forum: Global Competitiveness: Implications for the Nation’s Higher Education System, GAO-07-135SP, January 23, 2007
(<http://www.gao.gov/docsearch/abstract.php?rpto=GAO-07-135SP>)

-Restoring U.S. Competitiveness for International Students and Scholars, June 19, 2006 by NAFSA (which updates and expands NAFSA's 2003 task force report on "In America's Interest: Welcoming International Students."
(http://www.nafsa.org/_/Document/_/restoring_u.s.pdf)

This public policy paper's highlights include:

-“The best and the brightest from around the globe are now a sought-after commodity, and are able to choose from many centers of excellence where they can ply their creative skills.”

-“What is most alarming is that, for the first time, the United States seems to be losing its status as the destination of choice for international students.”

-“We will not win back the market simply by adjusting visa procedures, and we will not win it back with a public relations campaign.”

-“We must reform our immigration laws in order to create and support a climate that encourages the contributions of foreign talent.”

-“To get back on track, America needs to do better. We renew our call for national leadership to elevate international educational exchange as a national priority and to establish a national strategy to ensure that the United States can attract the best talent from around the globe.”

As for barriers, NAFSA, the world's largest association of international education professionals, has given collective voice to the sentiments of their 9,000 members who work on a daily basis with the legislation and regulations pertaining to international students. A clear and contemporary example is NAFSA's letter of May 8, 2007 to the Department of Homeland Security in which it spells out the statutory and regulatory changes that it feels are necessary for the U.S. to attract the world's best and brightest students.

Some of the nuts and bolts barriers that we hear about from our various campus contacts in the Davis UWC Scholars program include:

-Visa cost, personal interview, and security checks remain issues. Many would want us to return to the days when fees were less burdensome and visas could be obtained through the mail. Regardless, there is a growing appreciation for the State Department's many efforts of late to improve visa processing times, etc.

-Visa renewal process is problematic and our student advocates would like to see a modification to how the initial visa is granted. Ideally they'd like to see such visas granted for a five year period or alternatively allow visas to be renewed within the U.S.

-Work authorization – there is widespread sentiment that off-campus as well as on-campus work should be permitted during the authorized program of study and that the Optional Practical Training timeframe now of twelve months should be extended to 24 months.

-And, along with many other interest groups, our campus contacts clamor for more H-1 visas in order for their graduates to be able to stay and work in the U.S.

Finally in the arena of barriers, though it is mentioned less often in industry-wide documents, our contacts recognize the economic barrier to greater diversity of international students coming to the U.S. This may be why they are so enamored of the Davis United World College Scholars Program that I will now discuss.

A VIEW FROM THE PRIVATE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR

We are a nation built on diversity and differences. Ours is a culture of philanthropy. These are distinguishing national traits and they are interconnected. Philanthropy can help build community out of diversity while it can also help equip and empower leaders of community.

It is this dynamic interplay of philanthropy, community and individual leadership that underlies the creation and development of the Davis United World College Scholars Program. The program is committed to achieving cross-cultural understanding (community) among talented students (potential leaders) from diverse backgrounds, American and non-American alike. During the 2006-07 academic year, the Davis UWC Scholars Program provided scholarship support at 76 American colleges and universities for over 1,100 students from 126 nations. This will grow in the 2007-08 academic year to approximately 1,400 students. And those numbers do not count the many other American students positively impacted by these growing critical masses of globally-engaged scholars.

From our vantage point, the future stability of our world and America's place in it demand nothing less than bold initiatives like this. Donor Shelby Davis is a philanthropist with a mission. He is demonstrating the huge potential of philanthropy to promote international understanding through the education of exceptional young people (presumably future decision-makers) from throughout the world. And he is doing this exclusively at American colleges and universities on purpose – so that the impact of his philanthropy immediately benefits numerous American students and institutions as well.

The Davis United World College Scholars Program provides scholarship grants to selected partner colleges and universities across the U.S., with the size of annual grants determined by how many graduates of the worldwide United World College schools (which amount to the last two years of high school and award the International Baccalaureate Diploma) matriculate at each selected American institution of higher education.

The twelve UWC schools are located around the world in: Bosnia, Canada, Costa Rica, Hong Kong/China, India, Italy, Norway, Singapore, Swaziland, the United Kingdom (Wales), the United States (New Mexico) and Venezuela. The UWC “movement” has evolved from the original genius of German-born educator Kurt Hahn, also the founder of Gordonstoun and Outward Bound, who first presented the UWC idea at a 1956 NATO meeting in Paris. His idea was that one way to try to prevent another world war would be to bring together some of the world’s most promising teenagers (16-19 years old) and have them live together for two years of academics, community service and character-building physical education, through which life-long relationships would be established. The concept grew from its first campus in Wales, founded in 1962 at the height of the Cold War, to now twelve campuses, initially through the tireless patronage of Lord Mountbatten, who was succeeded by his nephew Prince Charles, and now by Queen Noor of Jordan and Nelson Mandela, a parent and grandparent of UWC students at the Swaziland campus. Students are chosen annually through rigorous national competitions conducted by indigenous, voluntary committees. Winners are awarded places and scholarships at whichever of the UWC schools can accommodate them.

Philanthropist Shelby Davis first became involved when he met UWC students at the U.S. campus in New Mexico in the late 1990s. Davis generously endowed 100 full scholarships to allow selected Americans to go on full scholarships to these UWC schools around the world. Through this association, Davis developed the vision that has become the Davis UWC Scholars Program at American colleges and universities. It began as a pilot program of 42 UWC graduates matriculating in the Class of 2004 at five schools with Davis family connections: Princeton, Wellesley, Middlebury, Colby and College of the Atlantic. Its goals were, and continue to be, the following:

- provide scholarship support for exemplary and promising students from all cultures, who have absorbed the passion of their UWC school community for building international understanding in the 21st century.

- build clusters (critical masses) of these globally aware and committed students within the undergraduate populations of selected American colleges and universities.

- seek to transform the American undergraduate experience through this international diversity and cultural interchange -- as much for the large majority of American students on campus as for international students.

-urge and expect partner colleges and universities to leverage the value of this initiative and its funding – for their students and faculties, their strategic direction and their institutional roles in contributing proactively to the well-being of our volatile, highly interdependent world.

-create a diverse but coherent group of Davis United World College Scholars who are expected, during their educational experiences and throughout their lives, to “give back” in shaping a better world.

The great potential of the Davis United World College Scholars Program is not simply to build and perpetuate an outstanding international scholarship program. It is also to motivate others, to provide a model, to apply leverage – all for the greater good of international understanding. We seek to foster a deep commitment to international diversity on American campuses and beyond. We believe the impact of this philanthropic investment goes far beyond the direct recipients of scholarship support. Here’s how some of the presidents of partner colleges describe the value of the program on their campuses and beyond:

“We are proud to be the headquarters and home campus for the nationwide Davis UWC Scholars Program, a visionary and transformative initiative for undergraduate education. By bringing together intelligent and intellectually hungry students from around the world, the program enriches the educational experiences of thousands of students at 76 campuses, challenging them to engage, confront, and understand difference. What better way to prepare the next generation of global leaders, ready to confront the great challenges of the 21st century.”

Ronald D. Liebowitz
President of Middlebury College

“The Davis United World College Scholar Program makes a valuable contribution to our campus community. The scholars are excellent students, and they bring a variety of experiences and perspectives into our classrooms and residence halls. They are building personal relationships that over the years will expand international understanding. This program helps Vassar fulfill its goals, including the education of national and international leaders who will be distinguished both in their professional careers and in service to their communities and the world.”

Catharine Bond Hill
President of Vassar College

“Some of the most educationally meaningful interactions that students have happen in their everyday exchanges with one another in the residence hall, in the lab, or in between classes. It is in these informal contacts, in subtle ways, that the knowledge of others is transferred. The greater the variety of students we welcome to Amherst, the greater the inventory of knowledge and culture there is to share. An institution that strives to serve the world must be a part of the world. The Davis United World College Scholars Program is helping to make the world more a part of us.”

Anthony W. Marx
President of Amherst College

“The David United World College Scholars Program is a critical tool in Haverford’s efforts to bring more international students and global perspectives into our classrooms. The presence of Davis UWC Scholars contributes to a key effort of our educational program, which is to define the real scope of ‘global citizenship’ for all our students.”

Thomas R. Tritton
President of Haverford College

And what about the donor’s perspective? Shelby M.C. Davis is committing a billion dollars to this effort. What does he think is the biggest impact? In his estimation, the building of clusters of international students at partner American schools is encouraging Americans to learn about the world, equipping them to be culturally-sensitive and effective communicators with others, as much as it is helping international students to grow intellectually and personally in an American context. Davis believes his philanthropic investment is contributing to a more promising future for Americans and their successes in the global marketplace of the 21st century as much as it is good for the Davis UWC Scholars per se. “I get letters from the students saying that they have made great American friends and they learn so much about America, while Americans have learned so much about the world from them. I think that’s important,” said Davis in a recent campus interview.

And what about the students who benefit from this philanthropy? Davis UWC Scholar Jawad Joya from Afghanistan, now a rising senior at Earlham College in Indiana, says “you are not just an alien.... You have the ability to change people’s views about the place you come from, the places you have been, and the kinds of places we can build together in the future. Diversity can evolve into a means for unity.” Jawad’s American classmate Anna Cromley-Effinger observes, “Over the course of time here, we do make friends from all over the place. It really grows our community. In a sense, it makes us a world community.”

And what about the faculty perspectives on this program? We receive countless glowing reports along the following lines:

“Colby’s international students, including the Davis UWC Scholars, bring tremendous strengths to the campus from which the entire student body benefits. Not only do they come to the College with an excellent academic preparation, but also they have a grounded appreciation for the real-world complexities to which the abstractions of classroom theories must be applied. This makes for very stimulating and challenging classroom discussions, as for example, in a class on the cultural and environmental dynamics of international tourist development during which American students exchange views with classmates from the Ukraine, Belarus, Nepal, and South Africa. As a teacher these are particularly exciting moments. I can see ‘light bulbs’ going on all over the room as students of all backgrounds come to recognize, in concrete ways, just how diverse their experiences are and how much they all have to learn from each other.”

Mary Beth Mills

Chair of Anthropology, Colby College

While it is still very young, the Davis UWC Scholars Program is clearly playing an important part in internationalizing American campuses, building meaningful relationships between international and American students. But that is not all that this program has set out to do. It is intended to be a leverage tool to accomplish more than it ever could just on its own.

By funding only a portion of the resources necessary for each scholar, our program is challenging our partner schools to raise and commit the necessary other funds required. We are looking to our partner schools for a long term, strategic commitment. In return, we make a five year rolling commitment of funding to our partner schools, always ensuring our support for students throughout their four years of undergraduate study and for the class being recruited in any given year. Yet, we always have the right to eliminate non-performing partner schools.

And we have already announced that we will use financial leverage to reward those partner schools which are successfully building significant clusters of scholars on their campuses. To encourage more schools to build such clusters, we will double the annual per-student grant for those partner schools which consistently enroll five or more first-year Davis UWC Scholars starting in 2008. Any partner school that matriculates five or more first-years regularly will qualify for a grant of up to \$20,000 per scholar (based on determined need), twice the amount of current grants of up to \$10,000 per scholar. We believe in the power of setting an example and using leverage to achieve the greatest possible results. By increasing the funding to those schools that are building clusters of scholars, we will be elevating the program’s potential and prompting schools to find new and better ways of leveraging the power of international diversity.

We are constantly looking to our partner schools to leverage Davis philanthropy in their own ways as well. And we are seeing concrete results. The most recent examples come from Amherst College and the University of Florida. At these places there are new international scholarship initiatives directly inspired by and modeled on the Davis UWC Scholars Program.

At the University of Florida, emerita professor of education Dr. Margaret Early was so impressed by Davis UWC Scholars she encountered that she decided to contribute a portion of one of the student's costs above what Davis philanthropy supports through a gift to the University of Florida Foundation. "I prefer not to know which one!" said Early, who continues to enjoy getting together for meals with various Davis UWC Scholars. A lifelong educator, Early believes the Davis UWC Scholars Program is doing something important. "Mixing young people from many different nationalities and parts of the world – that seems like a very good idea," she said.

At Amherst, a pledge of \$6 million by alumnus Arthur W. Koenig '66 is creating the Koenig Scholarship Program. Koenig calls the program an investment. It will benefit talented students of limited means from Latin America and Africa and will also support annual recruitment trips to those regions. "The structure of the Koenig Scholars Program is modeled on the Davis UWC Scholars Program in several ways," said Robyn Piggott, special assistant to Amherst President Anthony W. Marx. "It will support entering cohorts of five students from Latin America or Africa each year, meeting their full demonstrated financial need for all their four years at the college. The program also provides some funding for admission staff recruitment trips to both continents each year. Mr. Koenig's unique twist on the UWC model, which we are all very excited about, is providing small stipends to African and Latin American students who do recruitment work at underserved secondary schools in their home countries in the summer vacation. This will create a very powerful partnership between students and admission staff," added Piggott.

It is not just at Amherst (which is striving to join rival Williams College in extending need-blind admission to non-U.S. students) that international recruitment is getting a lift from the Davis UWC Scholars Program. Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri attributes growth in both its domestic and international recruitment to the program. Its Academic Dean George Forsythe notes, "Because we're emphasizing the global community piece and we're making that very clear and explicit in our marketing, we're getting more and more students who say 'I'm coming because of that.'" Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland reports exponential growth of international applications since the inception of the program. Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon maintains that "being part of this program...has helped us to re-invigorate our efforts to recruit very talented students internationally."

While the impact of the Davis UWC Scholars Program is being widely recognized and the motivation for more international students appears to be pervasive, the single largest hurdle to broader growth with real diversity at our partner schools and elsewhere is availability of financial aid. This leads me to draw a few conclusions and make a few recommendations for possible consideration by Congress.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In my estimation, it would be both timely and beneficial to America's role in the world for Congress to take some dramatic action to expand the number and diversity of international students coming to the U.S. for their undergraduate education.

Such dramatic action, taken ideally in combination with other policy initiatives to support more effective global engagement by Americans (e.g. a major investment in the teaching and learning of "critical languages" in the U.S.), is long overdue and could contribute rather swiftly to reversing the pervasive negative perceptions of the U.S. around the world today.

This is a particularly propitious time for action of this sort. News of it, if expertly handled, could serve initially as a positive antidote to all the attention being given in the media to anti-American sentiment. We could move from headlines such as "U.S. Slips in Luring World's Brightest" (The New York Times, December 22, 2004) to something like "U.S. Luring World's Brightest Again."

More substantively, we could demonstrate our re-commitment to using America's "soft power" so, in the words of Joseph S. Nye, "others want what you want" for reasons of shared human challenges and opportunities. My impression is that some of the anti-American sentiment out there is not profound (while some of it most certainly is and we should harbor no illusions about that), and with some positive developments on the Iraq front and a genuine and sustained use of our "soft power" we can once again become appreciated by many around the world who are presently berating us.

In that context, one of best tools of soft power is the perceived value of American higher education. In spite of everything else going on, American colleges and universities are still the envy of the world, still where the most talented, motivated and promising students around the world really want to be. The rapid and positive growth of the Davis UWC Scholars Program is ample evidence of that. Other and more established scholarship programs would make the same point. Among them, the Starr Foundation and the Freeman Foundation have supported many undergraduate scholarships for students from Asia. One of those scholars from Vietnam has recounted her U.S. educational experience this way: "...While being an international student in a white dominated community may be hard, it is at the same time very exciting and rewarding.

Although I had certain difficulties in adapting to a new lifestyle, I enjoyed sharing with others my experience as a student from a Third World country and showing them more about by cultures and values. Also, I could not help realizing that the interaction with the students whose backgrounds are totally different from mine is quite beneficial to me in learning how to be open-minded. Talking to them helped to enrich my knowledge a great deal. It's incredible how my friend circle and my perspective of the world have widened on this campus.”

Paraphrasing what I hear all the time from leaders on American campuses, after four years of study at an American college or university, international students come to appreciate America, our people and our way of life. Equally important, American students develop a broader and more encompassing view of the world around them. Putting international and domestic students together in a meaningful and rich educational context, among many other positive outcomes, fosters a feeling of mutual respect and appreciation for our commonalities and a more constructive way to view our differences.

While I do not have and cannot find any “metrics” on proving the value of international education, there are endless anecdotes, most all of them positive. Nor am I aware that international education is a partisan or political issue. Throughout my career, as well as in reaching out recently for feedback from many others so I could prepare this testimony, I have witnessed overwhelmingly positive reactions from occupants of both sides of the political aisle. Bruce S. Gelb, former head of USIA, was one of the recent respondents to my outreach for varied perspectives. He wrote recalling his own experience at the highest level of government and international diplomacy. He observed that “the turning point in the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico in the minds of President Salinas (25 years ago) and his senior cabinet officials was that a large percentage of them were Fulbrighters and uniformly their experience with studying in the United States was so unexpectedly positive that they lost whatever remained of that stereotypical ‘gringo’ feeling. Virtually all senior executives in the former USIA will tell you that the two crucial and essential programs for that agency were the Fulbright and the International Visitor programs – both basically doing the job of letting foreigners learn what the U.S. is really all about.”

Similarly, Bob Coonrod, President of The Public Diplomacy Council wrote, “If additional funds are available, the Council urges an increase in order to deepen the public diplomacy impact of these important programs and to sustain and strengthen the State Department’s core exchange programs worldwide while continuing to develop new, carefully selected initiatives. We count undergraduate programs among the exchanges activities that can be particularly effective. Their benefit is long term, and it is mutual. The students benefit, as do their countries. Finally, and most importantly, our nation benefits from such initiatives.”

I will conclude with a few recommendations for how major new funding for international education might be best invested:

- establish a fund to provide grants to American colleges and universities willing to truly partner, including sharing expenses

- the goal would be to educate a greater diversity of international students than ever before in American four year undergraduate degree programs; emphasize diversity

- stipulate that the students ought to be the best and brightest from all corners of the world

- expect schools to do their own recruitment and admission (collaboration among other schools is fine)

- avoid tendencies to centralize and bureaucratize; minimize overhead costs; maximize program expenses

- use leverage – partner schools must do their part, financially and otherwise; consider aspects of the Davis UWC Scholars Program model, including our two-tier grant making scheme to reward the best institutional performers

- demand accountability – we require annual reports which include the following content areas: roster spreadsheet with each individual and related financial aid documented; student forms completed by the students; narrative profiles of the students; description of admission outreach/recruitment efforts; admissions data; a description of programmatic, residential and other means of internationalizing the campus; and evidence of how funding is used to leverage other related fundraising.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to submit this testimony, and I truly hope to see something positive come out of this.

