

Bazaar del Mundo Revisited: NAFSA and the Global Workforce

By Ron Moffatt

Editor's note: This perspective piece offers an intriguing look at the burgeoning issue of Global Workforce Development as it relates to international education.

Global workforce development (GWD), is a concept not often discussed among international educators, but it is beginning to make waves within our associations. While refreshing NAFSA's Strategic Plan last March, the board of directors added a phrase to the mission statement: NAFSA serves its members, their institutions and organizations, and others engaged in international education and exchange *and global workforce development*. Since then several members have asked board members, "But why?"

As one who once wondered what the heck GWD was and what it had to do with NAFSA, I can appreciate the concern some may initially have about its heightened profile. But as one who has worked intimately for the past 30 years with thousands of students and countless programs that directly contribute to GWD, I can testify to the intrinsic relationship it has to the whole arena of international education.

While GWD may appear as a new addition to the NAFSA lexicon, its centrality to NAFSA's mission has been with us from the beginning. Some members may challenge the appropriateness of NAFSA supporting such a focus, concerned that higher education is becoming more and more a commodity of the mar-

ketplace, while educating the whole person for the advancement of the common good within a civil society continues to erode. But creating such juxtaposition assumes a battle between mutually exclusive forces. Imagine, instead, the academy as a dynamic worldwide bazaar of dialectics continuously vying for prime currency: pure versus applied research, theory versus practice curricula. In this context, GWD becomes just one more brick in the wall, and on many campuses, an increasingly prominent cornerstone.

In the 60s and early 70s many NAFSAs saw their roles as "agents of change" in reversing the "brain drain." A measure of pride was taken in thinking we were aiding other nations in their development efforts by training their teachers, their doctors, their engineers, their scientists, their business, and government leaders until their educational infrastructure reached the capacity to meet their own workforce training needs.

In the mid 70s and 80s, concomitant with the growth in study abroad programs, our roles evolved. There was an emphasis on the processes as well as extended outcomes of an international education. The sundry byproducts derived from cross-cultural living and learning were identified and appreciated. And students, both inbound and outbound, were promoted as value-added graduates who carried with them the distinction of possessing priceless multilingual and multicultural assets.

Now, within the last decade, with the full barrage of the "globalization boom" making its presence felt in almost every nook and cranny of the academy, it has become impossible to avoid the obvious: GWD is on everyone's plate. The vernacular for GWD on my campus, San Diego State University, is Global Skill Set (GSS)—the prerequisites for succeeding in a global economy and workforce acquired through cross-cultural living and learning. The demand for their acquisition here has propelled our international programs to the forefront of national prominence, as evidenced by NAFSA's recent *Internationalizing the Campus 2003* report. Ever since students discovered having a GSS significantly increases their competitiveness in most job markets, we've had our work cut out for us.

While the literature now abounds with studies on what constitutes "global literacy" or "global competencies" or "global skill sets," it is perfectly clear to students what it's all about. Anyone with a college education who can adjust to constantly changing circumstances, navigate between various cultural norms and taboos, communicate in more than one language, and create new solutions to meet new challenges in unfamiliar environments, can often select the employer they want. GSS are highly valued in any field of study, and imparting GSS has been at the heart of our study abroad initiatives. They have been specially honed in the many academic programs that now

require, or emphasize, an international learning component. Examples include: International Business, International Security and Conflict Resolution, Hospitality Management and Tourism, Theatre Arts, Foreign Languages and Area Studies.

It is evident, from the forces at work on many campuses, GWD will be one of the primary engines moving international education forward on the national agenda for some time to come. It's not a passing fad, it's not the tail wagging the dog, and it's no longer outside the box as far as NAFSA is concerned. It is central to what students seek, to what faculty profess, to what international educators do every day. GWD frames U.S. commerce and trade policies, driving much of what Congress votes for in keeping U.S. competitiveness alive and well in an increasingly complex and interdependent marketplace. GWD is also one of the most compelling reasons why companies will want to strengthen their alliances with NAFSA as they develop new products and services that meet the diverse needs we will inevitably encounter as the profession advances and constituencies grow.

All of us—policymakers, educators, practitioners, and vendors—can find common ground in the mission to shape and support the vanguard of the twenty-first century global workforce.

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