

*NAFSA: ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS*

**CELEBRATING 60 YEARS: A BRIEF HISTORY**

The end of World War II signaled the beginning of a dramatically different and changing global climate. Congress recognized that the United States, in its new leadership role, would need a better understanding and knowledge of the world. By passing the Fulbright Act in 1946 and the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948, Congress established the basis for a federally funded international educational exchange program.

**BEGINNINGS**

Outside Washington, DC, international educators were taking steps of their own. In 1948, the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers was formed at the Conference on International Student Exchange at the University of Michigan. Representatives from academic institutions, government agencies and private organizations, concerned about the plight of foreign students stranded in the United States during the war, joined together on their behalf. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, NAFSA demonstrated its capability by working with university administrators and government officials and raising financial aid for Chinese students left in limbo.

As NAFSA took on more challenges and gained wider recognition and support, the organization moved from the living room of its first president to an office space on the campus of New York University. The organization received a significant boost when NAFSA's president, Jim Davis, was asked to chair President John F. Kennedy's

task force on the international exchange of persons. Recommendations by the group became law with the 1961 passage of the Fulbright-Hays Act, which expanded government-sponsored exchange programs. In 1964, NAFSA's name was changed to "National Association for Foreign Student Affairs" in recognition of its growing interests and responsibilities.

NAFSA's third decade opened with the United States embroiled in war in Southeast Asia. Even the annual conference in 1970 could not escape the politically charged atmosphere, as attendees cheered and booed discussions of whether to allow individuals, particularly students, as full members. With the arrival of Chinese students in 1978 following a thaw in U.S.-Chinese relations, NAFSA began publishing books and papers related to educational exchanges between the two countries. Emergencies related to other parts of the world, particularly the Iranian revolution and concerns about Nigerian bank payments, led to the organization's appointment of national coordinators to deal with emerging issues.

**NEW CHALLENGES**

In the 1980s, new and burdensome regulations from the Immigration and Naturalization Service prompted NAFSA to create a Task Force on Regulatory Reform to advocate specific necessary changes. The support and mobilization of NAFSA members led to a change in the INS regulations in 1987 that reflected their work. The association celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1988, bringing together over

3,000 participants and featuring Senator J. William Fulbright as a plenary speaker. NAFSA continued to be politically active after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, sending “China Alerts” to keep students and scholars informed.

### **GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP**

By 1990, the number of foreign students at U.S. higher education institutions was approaching 400,000, a growing number of U.S. students were studying abroad, and NAFSA had 6,400 members on 1,800 campuses. That year saw another name change for NAFSA, to “NAFSA: Association of International Educators,” reflecting the now well-established role of its members in all aspects of international education and exchange. The organization launched a new magazine, *International Educator*, to promote broader awareness of international education issues. In 1999, NAFSA Executive Director and CEO Marlene M. Johnson called for the creation of a comprehensive international education policy for the United States, an idea later endorsed by President Bill Clinton in a memorandum he signed just before leaving office. NAFSA entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a reinvigorated public policy agenda.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, underscored the need for the United States to strengthen its relations with and

understanding of the world. They also presented international educators with new challenges, as foreign students and scholars encountered more difficulties applying for and securing visas and Congress mandated a new system for tracking foreign students and scholars. NAFSA worked to focus leadership and public attention on the importance of preserving the country’s openness to international educational exchanges. Today, awareness of and support for international education are strong in the United States. A national poll commissioned by NAFSA in 2005 showed that more than 90% of Americans believe it is important to prepare future generations for a global society. The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, a bill that NAFSA has actively promoted to dramatically expand participation in study abroad among U.S. college students, is currently making its way through Congress.

Today, with nearly 10,000 members, NAFSA continues to work to strengthen international education’s biggest asset – the professionals who make educational mobility possible – and to play a strong leadership role in Washington as an advocate for the importance of international education to the nation.

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**To learn more about our work on international education issues, contact:**



**Association of  
International Educators**

1307 New York Avenue, NW Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20006  
Tel: 202.737.3699 Fax: 202.737.3657  
<http://www.nafsa.org>