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>> News & Communications

[Duke News Home](#)
[Calendar of Events](#)
[Audio & Video](#)
[Experts](#)
[Duke Dialogue](#)
[Quick Facts](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Duke Home](#)

Opinion

Nannerl O. Keohane: Working Together to Promote Global Education

In her welcome to an conference on international education, President Keohane underscores the urgency of the cause of global education

Tuesday, January 28, 2003 | I am delighted to convene this intrepid group of scholars, teachers, foundation officers, corporate leaders, government analysts and officials from the Departments of Education and Defense, the State Department, the NEH, and beyond. I greet you in part on behalf of our absent provost, who as we speak is pursuing some institutional opportunities for collaboration in Viet Nam. I welcome you also as the chair of a new Association of American Universities task force on internationalization; those of you who are from AAU institutions will be asked later this year to help us learn more about best practices on our campuses and work together to enhance our collective efforts.

I am very pleased that the conference organizers wanted to give you a chance to see something of our campus. This area, which we call West Campus, was built pretty much all at once during the 1920's and '30s. As the university has expanded in recent decades with architecture of quite varying styles and degrees of excellence, we have always protected this beautiful central campus.

The Chapel was by design at its center. Our Founder-who stands outside, cigar in hand as befits a tobacco baron-wanted, in his words, "a great, towering church" in the middle of his campus, and this was what he got. As you've probably guessed, it was patterned closely on English Gothic architecture. The stained glass and stone work were done by European craftsmen imported for the purpose-one of our first significant international endeavors, built into this architecture. Many of those craftsmen stayed in this country, working on such projects as Washington's National Cathedral or remaining in North Carolina to raise their families.

Convocations and baccalaureate ceremonies all occur in the Chapel, as well as worship services for many denominations, concerts, lectures, and quiet meditation; in front of it we have inaugurations, student protests and demonstrations, crafts fairs-you name it. Welcome, then, to our inner sanctum.

News Sections

[Opinion](#)
[Other News Office](#)

Spotlight



[Meet the new faculty](#)

[Other Spotlight Features](#)

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[Information for Broadcast Media](#)



Like many of you, for several personal and professional reasons I have a particular interest in international education. Studying abroad had a formative influence on my own thinking and career. The years I spent at Oxford opened my eyes to a different and larger perspective on the world; I concluded that the importance of international exposure was paramount in a good education. In the last couple years, I have traveled for Duke to South America, Asia, Europe, and to both of our near neighbors, Canada and Mexico.

International elements are key to Duke University's current strategic plan, which says in part:

“In the new international environment of the post-cold war world, those who want to survive and thrive need to understand that they are no longer merely citizens of nation-states, but members of an interdependent world where nations are no longer masters of their own fate and individuals are part of an increasingly global community. The implications of these changes for institutions . . . that are responsible for education is that students need greater interaction with different peoples and cultures. Knowledge of different cultures and languages is critical to their development as human beings, to their professional lives, and to their capacities to fulfill their responsibilities not just as citizens of the countries where they were born, but as members of an increasingly global community.”

I suspect many of you who are higher education colleagues have similar language in your plans, regardless of whether your international efforts are coordinated through a special office or institute, a separate school or college, or like ours through a senior position in the central academic administration. Our own plan was written prior to September 11, 2001, and the case for this endeavor has only become stronger since that day, as our various constituencies increasingly expect international issues to be addressed by higher education.

Yet, as we know, this is also a period of significant backlash, in which many members of the public are suspicious of all foreigners, especially those from certain countries. They cannot understand why we would want to allow such people into our country, much less use our resources in higher education to educate them. We need to make our case for global education forcefully so that those citizens, too, will understand the urgency of this cause. And thus, as vice provost Gil Merx has put it, “the goal of providing every graduating student with foreign language fluency, international competence, and an understanding of international affairs has extraordinary salience in the post-September 11 United States.”

Like most of you, we have in recent years infused the undergraduate curriculum with more international content, increased the number of international students on campus, expanded opportunities for study abroad, welcomed faculty scholarship in area studies, asked our libraries to place a higher priority on collection development for the international area, encouraged international internships and faculty exchanges, and initiated partnerships with foreign universities and colleges.

But in the midst of all the trees, we try hard to keep some sense of the forest. Title VI has been instrumental in stimulating our growth in this area. Duke today has eight federally-funded Title VI international centers, up from four a scant decade ago. A number of these centers are made possible by our very active collaborations with our sister institution just down the road at UNC Chapel Hill-which for some sports fans may sound more difficult than establishing a partnership with a university 5,000 miles away! These collaborations range from our venerable and very successful joint Consortium in Latin American Studies to a newly opened Rotary International Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution.

A few statistics: on our own campus the Duke Center for International Development has 52 fellows and 73 public finance trainees from 34 countries, plus another 181 trainees abroad. Forty-seven percent of our undergraduates spend at least one semester or summer studying abroad, and we have more than tripled the number of international undergraduates in our student body since 1993. Almost 1/3 of our grad students are international. It's not that we owe all this to Title VI; it's that Title VI helped us leverage our interest.

As you know, America's higher education legislation has gradually evolved, first as the National Defense Education Act and then as the Higher Education Act, from its original preoccupation with graduate and professional education in the physical sciences and engineering. It came to accept a broader and very natural mandate, crossing the line from technical training into education in the wider sense.

The ups and downs of federal support for international education are, in some ways, American history writ small: since its founding, our country's public feeling and national policy have swung between the poles of isolationism and engagement, from "fortress America" to beacon to the world.

We have never lost our intellectual absorption with the rest of the world, though we have expressed it in different ways. In the 18th and much of the 19th century, we were anxious to prove we were different from and as good as the nations that birthed us-always shouting about what we were not, as D.H. Lawrence memorably

put it. In the 20th century America came of age as a world leader, and after World War II the wave of enthusiasm for international knowledge became, or seemed to become, unstoppable. The number of international studies Ph.D.s produced by American universities went up by 900% in the 22 years from 1948 to 1970. It was out of 20th century Cold War preoccupations, of course, that Title VI emerged as a model for academic and government cooperation.

In those heady days, the boundaries between government and universities were consistently permeable and amiable; in just a decade after the initiation of Title VI, substantial numbers of new specialists and linguists emerged. The comradeship was dampened with the Vietnam War, but the world was still a fairly familiar cluster of countries and alliances. The end of the Cold War brought a new set of challenges-not the hoped-for peace, but a multiplication of conflicts, initially local but increasingly global in scope.

So how do we get our bearings in this brave-or not so brave-new world? As a political theorist, I recognize war as an extension of policy, and see that peace can be an element of policy, too. As a university president, I know that interdisciplinary depth and breadth must undergird any meaningful understanding of culture, military or civil, colonial or imperial. As a human being, I feel an urgent wish that, over time, the scales be tipped toward the side of peace.

Perhaps most basic for this conference, America's most burning issues-from national security to competing in a global economy to how one might go about making peace-are all very much informed by international education, or devastatingly crippled by the lack of it. If the U.S. is to continue to exercise our leadership role in the decades ahead, we must focus responsibly on strengthening the ability of Americans to understand other cultures and nations and to speak their languages, literally and figuratively.

Higher education prides itself on a commitment to seek the truth. This means dealing with the uncomfortable and, often, challenging the prevailing orthodoxy. To dare to talk about peace in time of war is one example of such commitment; to be willing to consider war as an extension of policy in the face of isolationism is another. When we encourage our students to look beyond easy answers, to examine point and counterpoint with equal clarity and healthy mistrust-and to hone their judgment in order to reach their own well-informed conclusions-we are preparing them to be leaders in a complex society and in a turbulent, not always friendly world.

As educators we and our forebears have had at some times a

stabilizing and tempering influence, helping our leaders and representatives and presidents find a middle way; at other times, rather than influencing policy as experts, we have produced the manpower and womanpower and technical knowledge to implement what was already clearly desired; we have ensured that our nation proceeded better-informed and with keener wisdom along the path it had already laid out.

At *all* times, we have tried to help, and keep the focus wide rather than parochial. How effective that help has been, whether we are giving enough, whether we have got the right stuff, and what kinds of forecasts can be made about the future, are subjects for this conference, its speakers and attendees, to assess.

Whether training specialists to meet national needs, educating citizens, or pursuing an understanding of languages, areas, and cultures for their own sake, the work of higher education is intended to support the wider society that we serve. In addition to producing new knowledge, contributing to the wealth of our intellectual capital, and stretching the boundaries of human understanding, I think educators have a moral responsibility to try to create an educated citizenry and a better informed leadership.

Whatever happens when the Higher Education Act comes up for renewal, we must not lose sight of those imperatives. The fact that international education has a low profile in the federal government compared to other aspects of higher education is a fact of life these days. Yet there are many people here today who understand very well the urgent and ongoing role we have to play in a world that is getting smaller all the time. We should make this point better known in our statehouses and in Washington, D.C.

You are not gathered here to advocate but to diagnose, review, and understand. Yet now more than ever, in a very troubled and complex situation, when the forces of isolationism and xenophobia are pervasive in our country, we may well recall H.G. Wells' observation that "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe."

The urgency of the government's need for employees with a solid international education changes from decade to decade, but the underlying imperative-to understand our world well or risk losing it-has never been clearer than it is right now.

Title VI has succeeded in at least one important way despite its modest size relative to the federal education budget: it has been effective in leveraging resources for graduate and professional training on many campuses. Higher education is more internationally diverse and internationally savvy than it used to

be. And we trust that in the years ahead, the university will remain as a locus of innovation for government, and at least some of the time will serve as the conscience of our people.

Many of the United States government's sweeping and most practical programs and initiatives of the 20th century, from national parks to social security to banking reform, emerged with the collaboration of academia. Over the last forty years in particular, the federal government has partnered with higher education to create our nation's international expertise. Our duty to serve, to work together for the common good, is a vision that should be held in trust by every professor, researcher, and administrator of every American university and college.

That, ultimately, is why you are here. I honor your intention, your skill, and your scholarship. I hope you will forge new connections while you are here, both with people and with ideas.

And if you are new to our city and university, I hope this will be the first of many visits to Durham and to Duke. Enjoy the town, our campus, our gardens, and each other. Thank you.

This speech was delivered at a conference on [Global Challenges and U.S. Higher Education](#), held at Duke Jan. 23-25.

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