

Indonesia and United States Exchanges and Partnerships: A Brief Update

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There is increased demand worldwide for higher education to prepare students for the global economy. This feeling is evident in articles and other literature about institutional partnerships between two or more nations, new joint campuses and a variety of other exchange programs, grant funding opportunities, and study abroad. Proponents of such endeavors cite numerous mutual benefits for the countries involved: increasing cultural understanding, economic gains, enhanced foreign policy, learning outcomes, and developing international networks (Osfield and Terrell 2009). This article will briefly highlight the college student exchange relationship between the United States and Indonesia.

In 2010, United States President Barack Obama announced US\$165 million in funding for Indonesian academic partnerships, faculty and student exchanges, and other initiatives to create a comprehensive partnership to improve Indonesian higher education (Fischer 2010). Research opportunities for US academics included increased access to a country with daily seismic activity and a diverse ecological environment, as well as further knowledge about the fourth most-populated country and largest Muslim population in the world (Fischer 2010). Indonesia is also interested in making significant improvements to its higher education system, including establishing up to 200 community colleges by 2015 (Dessoff 2011).

In a May 31, 2011 joint letter to the editor of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dino Patti Djalal, Indonesian Ambassador to the United States, and Scot Marciel, United States Ambassador to Indonesia, implored US higher education institutions to make Indonesia-America student exchanges a higher priority:

We hope that as American colleges develop new student-recruiting strategies and contemplate partnership opportunities, you will consider Indonesia and its large number of higher-education institutions as destinations for study-abroad programs and scholarly research.

The ambassadors noted that Indonesia is the world's third largest democracy, one of the largest economies in the world and an increasingly-visible leader in Asia. Despite these prospects, few American students have studied in Indonesia. Although Indonesia has a population of 240 million, the number of Indonesians attending college is small. The Indonesian Ministry of National Education's Higher Education Long Term Strategy 2003-2010 report cited the need to continue work on increasing college access, particularly in some regions of the country.

The Institute for International Education's (IIE) *Open Doors Report 2011* was released in November. For over 50 years, the report has served as an important resource on international students studying in the United States as well as American students studying abroad. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 6,942 Indonesian students studied in American higher education institutions, ranking #19 among countries sending students to study in the United States. (IIE 2011. Peak enrollment of Indonesian students was in 1997-1998, when over 15,000 students attended US higher education institutions. The Indonesia-America academic partnership hopes to return those numbers to mid-1990 levels while doubling the number of American students studying in Indonesia.

However, the number of American students studying in Indonesia is disproportionately small compared to other countries. While approximately 200 American students studied in Indonesian higher education institu-

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tions in 2009-2010, over 1,200 US students studied in Thailand that academic year. U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, found the student mobility between Indonesia and the United States to be lacking and called for more effort to be put forth to build relationships between the two countries (Wilhelm 2011).

Ian Wilhelm (2011) reported that at a recent American-Indonesian education meeting, factors that may explain the low number of US students studying in Indonesia were discussed. These factors included the Asian financial crisis, incidents of domestic terrorism (most notably in the tourism-heavy area of Bali), and the 2004 tsunami. Collectively, these create a perception of Indonesia as being unsafe to visit. In addition, an IIE study that surveyed Indonesian institutions found that language barriers and the lack of on-campus housing may also deter American students. Likewise, Indonesian students are concerned about the perception that the United States is an uninviting country for Muslims. On the other hand, aggressive recruiting by higher education institutions in Australia and New Zealand appeal to Indonesian students, the message being that they can learn English, live closer to home, and likely spend significantly less (Dessoff 2011).

The recent summit of higher education officials from Indonesia and the United States will hopefully serve as a catalyst for improved relationships. After reviewing the summit report, I have suggested some necessary improvements to help facilitate this relationship:

1. Develop an easier process for scholar exchange, particularly obtaining visas.
2. Address perception issues such as anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States and safety in Indonesia.
3. Evaluate housing options on Indonesian campuses for international students, and explore family host exchanges.
4. Promote Indonesia's unique biodiversity and geographic features as well as its developing economy, including the tourism industry.
5. Highlight the successful partnerships between US and Indonesian institutions of higher educa-

tion, many of which have histories spanning over 40 years.

6. Identify opportunities to help improve Indonesia's higher education system, which American education students and faculty may find appealing to be involved in.
7. Promote funding opportunities available through governments and institutions.

While US higher education institutions have been aggressively seeking new ventures abroad (Altbach and Knight 2007), it is essential that these partnerships are truly mutually beneficial for the countries involved. Cultural, historical, and political considerations are integral to such processes. These considerations have the capacity to enhance appreciation, intercultural respect, and mutual understanding.

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