Global Skills

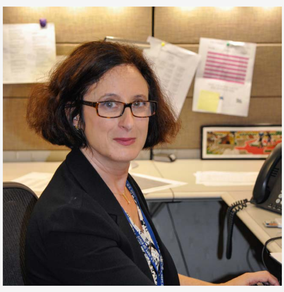
Office promotes learning worldwide

By Anthony Koliha, director, Office of Global Educational Programs, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs; Photos by Ed Warner

Each year, approximately 4.5 million students worldwide study outside of their home countries. The United States remains the top recipient of this global student mobility, with almost 900,000 international students studying here in 2013–2014, bringing global perspectives to American classrooms and communities, and contributing more than $27 billion to the U.S. economy. In 2012–2013, about 300,000 American students studied abroad, acquiring language skills as well as relevant regional and global insights. In addition, teachers and other professionals are participating in international education, developing their skills and competencies.

The Office of Global Educational Programs works to ensure that young leaders and professionals around the world have the international skills they want and need to succeed in the global economy. The office facilitates exchanges through such initiatives as the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, Hubert

Eythan Schiller is a program officer specializing in EducationUSA.



Maxine Lunn is an academic exchange specialist in the office.

H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, Critical Language Scholarship Program and a variety of teacher exchange programs. The office also offers community college initiatives. It also promotes international academic mobility through the EducationUSA global advising network and its recently launched U.S. Study Abroad branch.

Secretary of State Kerry has called international education a core component of diplomacy, saying it's vital "that young people absorb what true international education teaches: how to think critically, the importance of civility and a willingness to respond to contrary opinions with hard questions—not bitter denials or an insistence on dogma." An international education provides students with the skills and abilities necessary to function in a globalized society, successfully work with diverse groups of people and collaborate on such global challenges as public health, human rights and climate change.

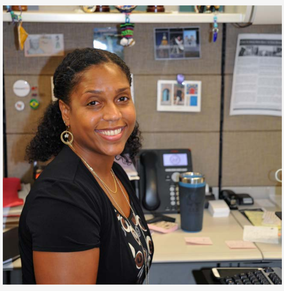
The EducationUSA advising network of more than 400 advising centers in 170 countries promotes U.S. higher education, helping international students choose from among the more than 4,700 accredited U.S. colleges and universities. EducationUSA also assists U.S. colleges and universities with international recruitment, and its growing digital presence reaches a combined physical and virtual audience of nearly 13 million individuals each year.

The office's new U.S. Study Abroad branch encourages more Americans to study abroad and develop global competencies. Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Evan Ryan recently encouraged government, business and the nonprofit community to "think and work creatively together to share the values of study abroad for our workforce and society." The new branch will engage with stakeholders and fulfill the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) commitment to expand access to and diversify participation in study abroad.

"Two of our signature programs, the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS) Program and the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, provide international experiences to the U.S. student population," explained program officer Angela Woods. "CLS has instilled hundreds of Americans with foreign language proficiency and an in-depth understanding of foreign cultures, while the Gilman program has broken the ceiling on minority participation in education abroad, with 56 percent of participants representing racial and ethnic minorities out of nearly 3,000 fellows annually."

The office also offers programs for professional audiences, through teacher exchange programs, the Humphrey

Betsy Devlin-Foltz takes a call in her cubicle.



Angela Woods manages the critical languages scholarship program.

Fellowship Program and the Community College Initiative. Teachers from the U.S. and abroad add an international aspect to their classrooms by sharing best practices on teaching, using technology and educating girls, or teaching about science, technology, engineering and medicine. The Humphrey fellowship, part of the Fulbright Program, provides midcareer professionals from developing countries with an academic year of intensive, graduate-level study at U.S. universities. Topics often studied include sustainable development, public health and building democratic institutions. The Community College Initiative provides early-career professionals from lower-income communities overseas with a year of education in technical fields such as information technology, management and hospitality at American community colleges. Meanwhile, the Community College Administrator Program introduces officials and educators from abroad to the American community college model as it relates to broader issues such as workforce development, vocational training and access to education.

The Office of Global Educational Programs continues to innovate. Recently, it pilot-tested EducationUSA Leadership Institutes, which provide foreign governmental representatives and senior educational administrators with professional development on key aspects of U.S. higher education. Topics have included making campuses more international, promoting university-industry linkages and achieving quality assurance and accreditation. EducationUSA Academy, another new initiative, offers summer programs on U.S. campuses that couple intensive English courses with college preparatory content, aiming to bring more international youth into U.S. higher education. The office also continues to incorporate new technology into its programming through virtual college fairs, an EducationUSA Chinese-language app, online platforms for teachers and a planned Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for college and university administrators on U.S. study abroad.

The office also seeks to increase efficiency and improve the work environment. To that end, and borrowing concepts from the private sector, it has established multiple cross-office teams to empower individual staff members to work together to build expertise around regional and functional portfolios. The office is also using new technologies and communications tools, such as the Slack messaging app, to promote the work of its teams. "Our goal," said the office's deputy director, Heidi Manley, "is to work smarter by empowering staff, providing them with tools for success, and trusting each staff member to work in teams and represent the office within the Department, with other government agencies and with the public on topics within their portfolios."

Through hard work and innovation, the Office of Global Educational Programs reaches millions of individuals each year and boasts notable multiplier-effect successes. For example, according to program officer Paul Schelp, returning Humphrey fellows can help tackle judicial corruption in a country or region, encourage local and national governments to respect labor and human rights, or spread new low-cost technologies to rural communities across the world. "Multiply these examples by the number of fellows in the Humphrey Program, across our teacher programs and through all the other programs and services provided by our office," Schelp noted, "and we contribute to making the world a safer, better and more vibrant place for all peoples and cultures."