



December 15, 2008

The Honorable Warren Christopher  
The Honorable Thomas Donilon  
The Honorable Wendy Sherman

Dear State Department Transition Advisors:

Throughout his campaign President-elect Obama spoke eloquently of the United States' role in the world. He articulated several key principles about a globally engaged America working with the world community to solve problems that cross borders and span oceans. These are principles that we embrace. Colleges and universities in the United States have been at the forefront of the global dialogue, welcoming international students, sending U.S. students abroad and working internationally in ways that bring people together to solve problems.

Colleges and universities in the United States are the destination of choice for students around the world. However, equally as important to our country is the number of U.S. students that have an education abroad experience. We ask you to include \$50 million in the State Department's budget request for FY 2010 to establish the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation. We propose a program and resources consistent with the recommendations of the Congressionally established Abraham Lincoln Commission on Study Abroad, and the authorizing legislation that passed the full House of Representatives and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously, but was hung up at the last minute on the Senate floor.

A strong study abroad program is vital to advancing the President-elect's foreign policy objectives, and to the economic prosperity and national security of the United States. The goal of the program is to have one million U.S. students studying abroad within 10 years. Currently, about 250,000 U.S. students study abroad and the annual growth rate has been 8 to 10 percent. If we can increase the annual growth rate to 15 percent, we will achieve the million students abroad annually in less than a decade. The goal is bold, and ambitious, but achievable. As the Lincoln Commission report explains this goal can be reached with a small federal investment. The Federal support will enable the program to increase substantially the number of U.S. college students studying abroad in developing nations and in other countries important to the national security and economic competitiveness of the United States. It will also increase dramatically the number of students now underrepresented in the study abroad population, including minority and low-income students. Students in fields such as mathematics or physics that have historically not prioritized study abroad will have greater opportunities for an international experience.

A key feature of the legislation was the creation of an independent foundation that would administer grants through a competitive process. While there would be scholarships to individuals, a larger proportion will go to institutions that must demonstrate that they will undertake internal reforms and allocation of resources to increase and sustain the increased study abroad numbers. Administrative costs will be kept to a bare minimum. The basic concept is that the number of students participating in quality programs increases, as several colleges and universities have demonstrated, when the institution makes the commitment and effort to achieve the goal.

We are approaching the point where some type of international experience is expected for undergraduate education. The Simon program would go a long way toward internationalizing our nation's colleges and universities. Preparing today's students to operate effectively in a global environment requires strong study abroad programs. The Lincoln Commission found that students who study abroad have a much wider understanding and perspective about the world, and their knowledge of global affairs is increased immensely. Moreover, they are more likely to retain foreign language skills learned through their experience abroad and often continue language study on their return. That is why the Department of Defense's National Security Education Program, which focuses on developing a cadre of experts with skills in languages critical to the U.S. national security, integrates an experience abroad into its programs.

As noted above, the clock ran out on the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of Congress before the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act (H.R. 1469 and S. 991) could be moved through the Senate Floor, where it was held up by a single senator. We were very pleased to have the President-elect's support as an original cosponsor to the bill. Our discussions with Congressional staff have led us to believe that the Simon study abroad legislation is something that will move early in the next session because of its overwhelming support and non-controversial nature. Having it included in the FY 2010 Administration request to Congress would facilitate the necessary appropriations.

Studies consistently show that U.S. students score below their counterparts in other advanced countries on indicators of international knowledge. This lack of global literacy is a national liability in an age of global trade and business, global interdependence, and global terror. If U.S. college students are to be able to function effectively in the world into which they will graduate, it must become the routine, not the exception, for them to study abroad in high-quality programs in diverse locations around the world. For that to happen, a national initiative is needed to provide them with opportunities to acquire the skills, attitudes, and perceptions that allow them to be globally and cross-culturally competent.

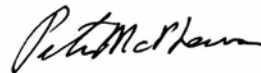
The case for study abroad is unimpeachable and has been embraced by all sectors of American society. By numbers ranging from 77 to more than 90 percent, Americans believe that it is important for their children to study abroad and to learn about other countries and cultures.

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Businesses readily understand the skill sets study abroad students develop through their experience and enhance their value as employees.

We hope you agree and recommend that the President-elect's FY 2010 budget will include money to establish and implement the Simon study abroad program. We underline that it is very important that this program complement, and not substitute for, existing public diplomacy and education activities. These other programs are important for the country. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Cordially,



Peter McPherson  
President

Founded in 1887, the [National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges](http://www.nasulgc.org) (NASULGC, A Public University Association), is an association of public research universities, land-grant institutions, and many state public university systems. Its 218 members enroll more than 4.7 million students and award nearly 1 million degrees annually. With nearly \$30 billion in research, NASULGC-member universities comprise 10 of the top 20 universities in total federal spending on research and development in science and engineering. As the nation's oldest higher education association, NASULGC is dedicated to excellence in learning, discovery and engagement. For more information visit [www.nasulgc.org](http://www.nasulgc.org).