

UCIA Meeting
April 17, 2009 2:30-4:00
International Affairs Office, Meeting Room A

Present

Don Back, *Director, Language and Culture Institute*
Mike Bertelsen, *Associate Director, OIRED and Associate Dean, CALS*
Cynthia Bonner, *Chief of Staff and Director of Administration, Student Affairs*
John Browder, *Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, College of Architecture and Urban Studies*
S.K. De Datta, *Associate Vice President for International Affairs and Director, OIRED*
John Dooley, *Vice President for Outreach and International Affairs*
Paul Hover, *Performing Arts and Foreign Languages Librarian*
Matthew McMullen, *Program Director for Education Abroad*
Miriam Rich, *Communications Coordinator, OIRED*
Nicole Sanderlin, *Graduate Research Assistant, Outreach and International Affairs*
Glenda Scales, *Associate Dean for International Programs and Info Technology, College of Engineering*
Richard Shyrook, *Department Chair, Foreign Languages and Literatures*
Barry Simmons, *Director, Scholarships and Financial Aid*
Debra Stoudt, *Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences*

Guests

Khidir Hilu, *Professor, Biological Sciences*
Humphrey Fellows:
Lama Hamish Ahmad (*Syria*)
Marie Chantal Koffi (*Cote D'Ivoire*)
Outeiba Merhebi (*Lebanon*)
Bikash Rai (*Nepal*)
Eugenia Saini (*Argentina*)

1. Welcome, introductions, and approval of minutes

The meeting was called to order by Lance Matheson and participants introduced themselves. The minutes had been submitted previously for electronic approval. Due to time constraints on behalf of several of the participants, the order of the agenda was modified to accommodate their schedules.

2. Presentation on Iraq: Khidir Hilu, Lance Matheson

Lance Matheson and Khidir Hilu gave a presentation on their recent trip to Iraq. The trip had been organized by the Department of Defense as part of the rebuilding effort within the country; from among the various universities invited, Michigan State University and the University of Idaho also participated. Dr. Hilu and Dr. Matheson showed slides of the sites they had visited, which included the universities of Kufa, Baghdad, and Babylon; they met with upper-level members of the administration of those institutions as well as Iraqi government officials such as the ministers of Higher Education, Research, Industry and Minerals, and Science and Technology. Dr. Hilu and Dr. Matheson reported that there is a total of 10,000 student scholarships available for Iraqis who wish to study in the US during the next five years; the majority of these (80%) are at the undergraduate level. Dr. Matheson and Dr. Hilu spoke with

Karen DePauw, dean of the Graduate School, to discuss what assistance Virginia Tech might be able to offer; however, it is still difficult for potential students to receive U.S. visas. Dr. Hilu and Dr. Matheson reported that Iraqi students are interested in the areas of nanotechnology, biodiversity, agriculture, water quality management, environmental engineering, renewable energy, and e-government; there are likely many other areas of interest, such as the social sciences, but they did not have the opportunity to speak with other departments. Among other requests are assistance in increasing English proficiency, curriculum development, procuring donations, advising, improving administration, and training opportunities. The next steps will be to invite several of the government ministers to Virginia Tech and identify faculty sponsors who can assist in organizing visits. Dr. Matheson and Dr. Hilu concluded their presentation by stating that the citizens of Iraq are hopeful; they view these connections as critical to the rebuilding efforts that are starting to take place as the country recovers from the massive devastation it has experienced.

3. Education Abroad: Matthew McMullen

Dr. McMullen commented that there have been steady increases in numbers of participants in overseas programs from 2004 through 2008, 90% of which have been through faculty-led programs. There have also been similar increases in other types of international opportunities, such as exchange programs. These numbers indicate that student interest is strong, but questions remain as to how funding can be increased. Lance Matheson distributed excerpts from past UCIA meetings during which this topic had been discussed, and pointed out some of the issues involved; for example, the college of engineering has no summer classes and therefore no budget for summer programs. Dr. Matheson expressed an interest in offering a proposal to address this situation. John Dooley suggested that a task force be formed to prepare such a recommendation that could take effect summer of 2010; he proposed that the group consist of an associate dean from one of the colleges, as well as Dr. McMullen, Tom Wilkinson, and a representative from the budget office. Glenda Scales volunteered to serve as the representative for the associate deans. The task force will focus on framing the issue and offering choices before ultimately becoming an initiative of the Commission on Outreach and International Affairs (COIA). Richard Shryock also mentioned a task force on foreign language proficiency in response to the need for more intensive courses and observed that the current system makes it difficult for these new courses to start up. He pointed out that revamping the current structure could also create opportunities for the university to generate additional revenue.

Dr. McMullen closed his portion of the meeting by mentioning the possibility of utilizing other universities' natural resource councils as an additional means of program enhancement. Most of these organizations offer area studies that include built-in requirements for outreach. Duke and North Carolina are the two institutions closest to Virginia Tech with these councils, which potentially can be used to help with the internationalization of the university as well as a resource for funding creative programming.

4. Scholarship and Financial Aid information: Barry Simmons

Barry Simmons, director of the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, gave a presentation on financial aid for education abroad opportunities that addressed how the office can assist students in their plans to study overseas and how students can most effectively utilize the services available to them. In a general overview of the office, Dr. Simmons highlighted the role and mission statement of the department as it pertains to the institution, noting that the university must adhere to state as well as federal requirements. John Dooley called attention to the growth in the unsubsidized loans, which Dr.

Simmons explained as being due to the economic situation as well as to a change in law. Dr. Simmons added that Virginia Tech is a direct lending institution and does not use banks. Dr. Simmons noted that 6 – 9 months prior planning is required for students hoping to study abroad and results are received soon after applying; he reminded the group that students need to provide exact data matches in order to facilitate the process; i.e., consistent use of full names, middle initials, etc. Students should also be clear in providing information regarding all awards given, as there are federal and state requirements to re-negotiate loans and financial aid packages based on other awards. Dr. Simmons reiterated that resources are available to assist with reasonable expenses for education abroad experiences, such as PLUS loans. The concern remains that students are often unaware that they have several funding options available to them and suggestions to publicize these resources were offered, such as the booth at the Education Abroad fair and the pertinent sections on the university website. Dr. Simmons stated that ideally all students should fill out financial aid applications in order to reduce waiting time should opportunities present themselves on short notice; this would also enable the office to build a more comprehensive database. He suggested that students be advised and encouraged to explore options in alternative countries where the cost could be significantly lower. Matt McMullen added that there are programs available in countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and East Asia; however, Dr. Dooley pointed out that students often feel they have limited choices based on faculty experiences that will advance their academic interests.

5. Award of HED Planning Grant, Southern Sudan: S.K. De Datta, Mike Bertelsen

Dr. De Datta distributed several handouts to council members that highlighted the work and projects of the Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIRE). He then announced that OIRE recently won a competitive planning grant awarded by Higher Education Development (HED) to work with in southern Sudan in conjunction with the University of Juba and the Catholic University on post-conflict building to redevelop the country's agriculture program. The partnership is expected to last 10 -15 years.

6. Humphrey Fellows: Don Back

Language and Culture Institute director Don Back presented five of the ten visiting Humphrey fellows participating in this year's program, which is based on competitive proposals and offers a nine-month academic program featuring intensive English language training. The guests introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their backgrounds and the universities with which they will be affiliated in the fall. Don invited council members to attend a reception for the visitors on April 29 at 4:45 p.m. at the Graduate Life Center and distributed copies of the biographical sketches of the participants to facilitate their professional networking as well as any collegial contacts.

7. Informational items: council members

No council members had any additional items to share with the group.

8. Next meeting

Due to conflicts in many council members' schedules, it was decided to cancel the May 28 meeting. The next meeting will be held at the beginning of the Fall 2009 semester.